

BBC

"We now know that the boys survived"

Has the mystery of the **Princes in the Tower** really been solved?



HISTORY

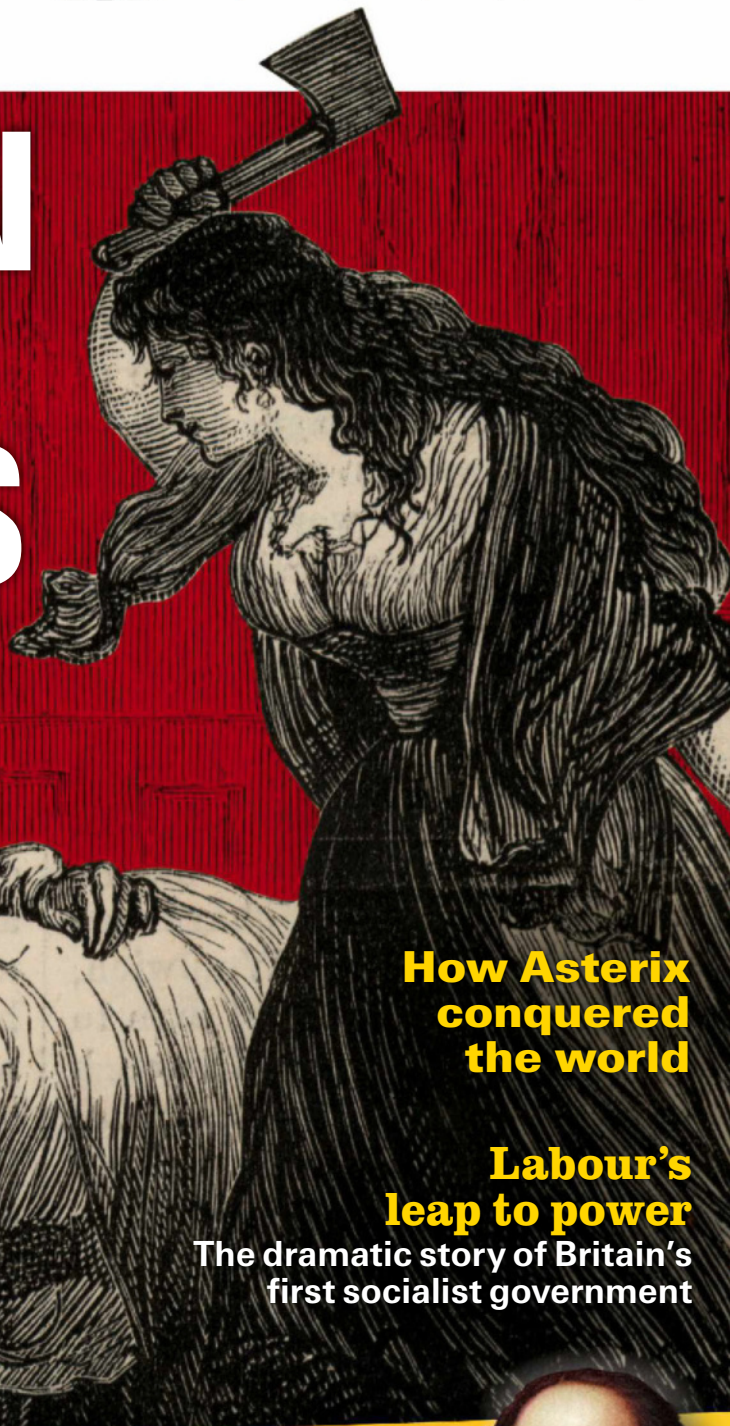
MAGAZINE

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE

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VICTORIAN MURDER SCANDALS

What six killings tell us about
women's lives in the 19th century



**How Asterix
conquered
the world**

**Labour's
leap to power**

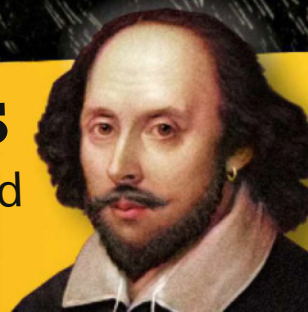
The dramatic story of Britain's
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The British Schindler

How Nicholas Winton saved
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“Read him, therefore; and again, and again: and if you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him.” So write the compilers of Shakespeare’s *First Folio*, a collection of his plays published 400 years ago, in their preface to the work. And it’s safe to say that he *has* been read again and again in the centuries since. But while his literary merits are widely exhortated, for historians the plays also provide fascinating **insights into Shakespeare’s world and worldviews**. In our feature on page 22, we’ve asked eight experts to reflect on the themes that emerge from eight of his works – from love and death to politics and racism.

One man who certainly didn’t benefit from Shakespeare’s quill is Richard III, one of the playwright’s greatest monsters. In *Richard III* he is responsible for the **murder of the princes in the Tower** and many historians believe that this was indeed the case – but a lack of clear evidence means this remains something of a mystery. Now, Philippa Langley, famous for her work in discovering Richard’s remains, has published a book exonerating Richard and we spoke to her for this month’s author interview. That’s on page 66 and I expect we’ll have a full postbag in response.

Murder is also the theme of this month’s cover feature, which ties in with a new series of Radio 4’s *Lady Killers with Lucy Worsley*. Beginning on page 57, the series’ consultant, Rosalind Crone, examines **six murders from the 19th century** that offer a window into women’s lives and the societies that shaped them.

Rob Attar
Editor



THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Gaul blimey

I loved the *Asterix* books as a child, but I wasn’t aware that when the comic was first published in Britain in 1963, the lead character was given the anglicised name Little Fred (page 43).



2. Best before 4,000 BC

I was intrigued to read in this month’s Q&A that a 6,000-year-old Welsh recipe has been reconstructed, which uses stinging nettles and animal intestines to make a kind of Stone-Age haggis (page 52).

3. Crowning achievement

In Ed Davey’s *My History Hero* interview (page 90), he asks: “Did you know that Æthelstan was the first English king shown wearing a crown?” And I must confess, I didn’t.

THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Farah Karim-Cooper

“The scene in which Hamlet holds up a skull might seem shocking today, but in Shakespeare’s time it was a reminder of mortality, and that you had to live your life because that’s how you were going to end up.” **Farah is among the historians exploring what Shakespeare’s plays tell us about his era on page 22**



Richard Towe

“A century after the formation of the first Labour government under Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, this short-lived but pivotal episode does much to explain the course of 20th-century British political history.” **Richard tells the story of Britain’s first Labour government on page 32**



Philippa Langley

“I was looking for something in the record that said that the princes in the Tower had died. What the Missing Princes Project found defied expectations.” **Philippa explains what her new research into the fate of the princes in the Tower has revealed on page 66**



Frances Spalding

“What is it that makes the Bloomsbury Group still the subject of huge admiration as well as angry debate? How is it that such a diverse group of friends went on meeting and talking together over a long period?” **Frances chronicles the enduring cultural impact of the Bloomsbury Group on page 46**

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CONTENTS

JANUARY 2024

57



FEATURES

22 Shakespeare's world

Eight experts explore what the playwright's works tell us about love, power, monarchy and death

32 Labour's leap to power

A century ago, Ramsay MacDonald became Labour's first prime minister. **Richard Toye** charts his entry to, and rapid departure from, Downing Street

38 How Asterix rewrote ancient history

Eran Almagor shows how the plucky Gaulish warrior has shaped our understanding of the classical world

46 Radical lives of the Bloomsbury Group

Frances Spalding reveals how this influential London set transformed British culture in the early 20th century

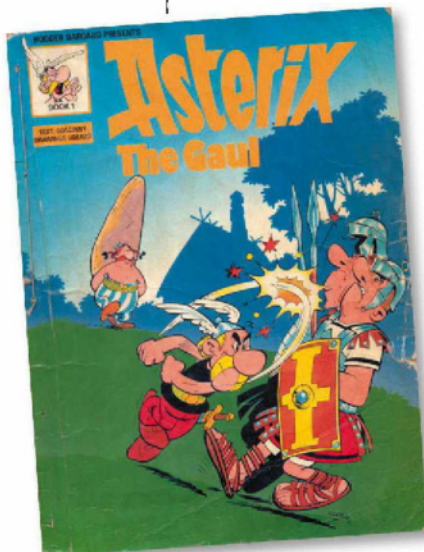
54 The British Schindler

Edward Abel Smith tells the story of Nicholas Winton, who helped save hundreds of children from the Nazis

57 Victorian murder scandals

Rosalind Crone explores six killings that shine a light on women's lives in the 19th century

38



EVERY MONTH

6 Anniversaries

The Conversation

- 11 Political comebacks
- 14 The history behind *The Crown*
- 17 **Michael Wood** on new Anglo-Saxon discoveries
- 19 **Hidden Histories**

20 Letters

- 52 **Q&A** History questions answered

Books

- 66 **Interview:** Philippa Langley on the fate of the princes in the Tower
- 70 New history **books reviewed**

Encounters

- 77 **Diary:** Things to see and do this month
- 83 **Podcast:** Courtesy and chivalry
- 84 **Explore:** Mount Edgumbe, Cornwall
- 86 **Historic Cities:** Dublin
- 88 **Prize crossword**
- 90 **My history hero**
Ed Davey on Anglo-Saxon king Æthelstan

54



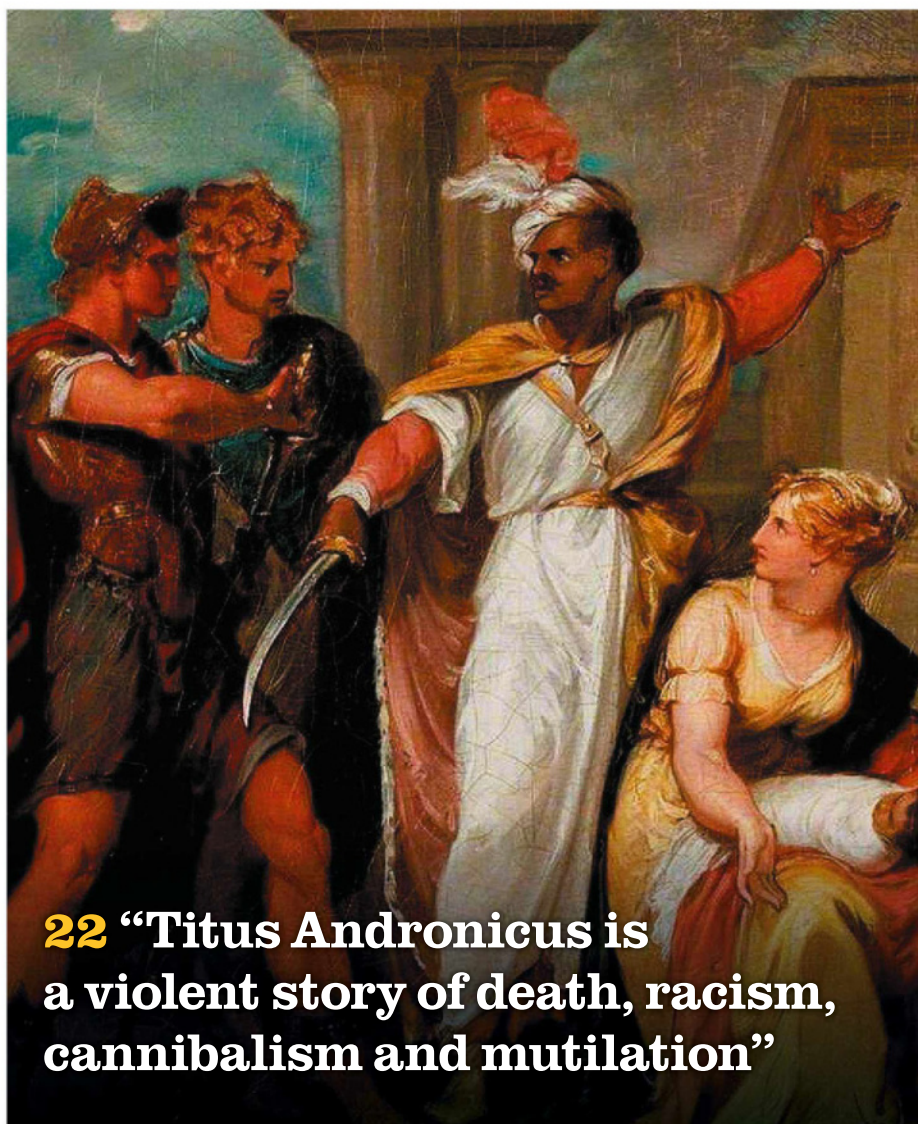
84



46

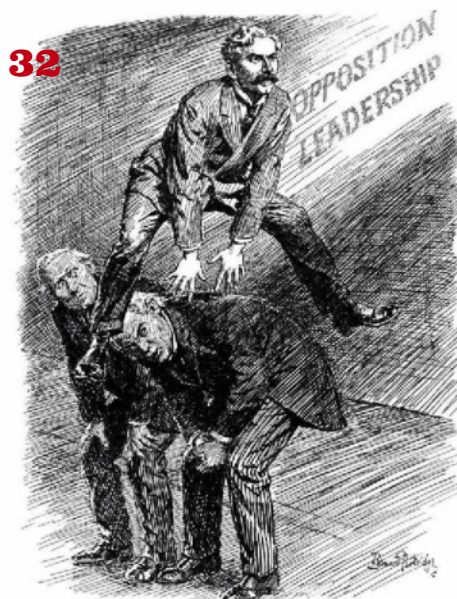


66



22 “Titus Andronicus is a violent story of death, racism, cannibalism and mutilation”

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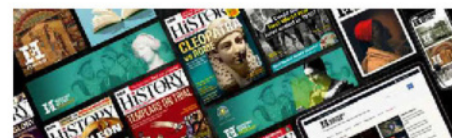
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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in January in history

7 JANUARY 1610

Galileo discovers Jupiter's largest moons

The astronomer finds evidence that Earth is not the centre of the universe

During the winter of 1609–10, the Florentine astronomer Galileo Galilei was peering into the night sky using a homemade telescope in Padua. The polymath had managed to drastically increase the instrument's magnifying capability, bringing distant celestial objects into sharper focus. On 7 January he pointed it towards Jupiter and spotted something strange. Around the blurry disc of the remote giant planet, he observed three points of light arrayed in a line which he initially postulated to be stars. Galileo turned his telescope to the same spot night after night, noting that the lights appeared to move in the 'wrong' direction. On 13 January, a fourth star had appeared.

Gradually, it dawned on him that these orbs were in fact moons orbiting Jupiter itself, which he named the 'Medicean Stars' in honour of Tuscany's ruling Medici family.

At a time when the Catholic church asserted that celestial objects revolved around the Earth, this discovery partly corroborated Nicolaus Copernicus's radical theory that our world was not the centre of the universe. Two months later, Galileo published his findings in *Sidereus Nuncius* ('The Starry Messenger'). Eventually, the moons Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto, named after the victims of Zeus, would come to be known collectively as the 'Galilean moons'.

A copy of *Sidereus Nuncius*, in which Galileo published his extraordinary discoveries



GETTY IMAGES

An 1826 map of Vermont, which declared its independence from Britain in January 1777



15 JANUARY 1777

In Westminster, a town lying in territory disputed by New York and New Hampshire, 72 delegates declare independence from Britain. **The republic goes on to adopt the name 'Vermont'**, before joining the United States of America 14 years later.

8 JANUARY 1959

Fidel Castro enters Havana in triumph

The revolutionary heralds a new era for Cuba

After eight days traversing Cuba, the 32-year-old revolutionary Fidel Castro was finally in sight of the Caribbean island's capital city, Havana. A week before, Cuba's much-loathed dictator, Fulgencio Batista, had fled the country, taking everybody by surprise. Expectations were at fever pitch as cameras relayed every step of Castro's convoy to Cubans glued to their televisions. On 8 January, he arrived to rapturous crowds who clambered atop the capital's American-made automobiles, acclaiming the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

Years earlier, on 26 July 1953, Castro, along with his brother Raúl, had spearheaded a botched uprising that landed them both in jail. Released as part of an amnesty two years later, they regrouped in Mexico where they befriended the Argentinian Marxist Ernesto 'Ché' Guevara, and formed a guerrilla organisation called the 26th July Movement. In December 1956, they returned to Cuba and eventually established a base within the Sierra Maestra mountains.

Despite efforts to smash Castro's insurgency, the Cuban army proved no match for the rebels' guerrilla tactics. Guevara's capture of ammunition bound for government forces near Santa Clara in late December 1958 sounded the death knell for Batista's regime.

On 1 January, Castro embarked on a long, deliberately slow journey across Cuba. Supporters flocked to catch a glimpse, listen, or even touch him as he approached Havana. He also ensured that his pilgrimage took in rival powerbases and swept aside the vestiges of the old regime.

Few who witnessed Castro's triumphant entry into Havana on 8 January could have guessed that he would go on to become the 20th century's longest-serving non-royal leader. He was far from universally popular: his dictatorial regime's social and cultural achievements (such as near-universal literacy) were accompanied by the repression of political opponents – and he was the survivor of more than 600 assassination attempts. Yet there's little doubting Fidel Castro's impact on his nation and the wider world over five decades.



Fidel Castro (with raised arm) and members of the 26th July Movement greet crowds in Havana as the Cuban Revolution sweeps away the Batista regime

The Cullinan diamond was cut into nine stones, one of which is pictured here



26 JANUARY 1905

A 3,106-carat diamond is unearthed near Pretoria in South Africa. The **Cullinan** is presented to Edward VII and cut into nine smaller stones, two of which are set into the Sovereign's Sceptre and Imperial State Crown.



15 JANUARY 1919

Rosa Luxemburg is murdered

The Marxist activist falls victim to a far-right militia in Berlin

Three days before the armistice formalising the end of hostilities of the First World War on 11 November 1918, Polish-born Marxist Rosa Luxemburg left her prison cell in Breslau (present-day Wrocław). Her immediate aim was to instigate a socialist revolution in Germany; yet instead she would fall victim to a far-right backlash that ended in her assassination just weeks later.

Luxemburg's release from prison coincided with Germany being plunged into chaos by Kaiser Wilhelm II's abdication and the proclamation of a republic from the windows of the Reichstag in Berlin by her erstwhile comrades in the Social Democratic Party. (Back in 1914, she had been dismayed by the party's support for Germany's entry into the war, which she attacked as a betrayal of socialist values.)

Alongside Karl Liebknecht and other revolutionary socialists, Luxemburg founded

the Spartacus League – named in honour of the slave who had led an uprising against Rome in the first century BC. Their anti-war pamphlets and calls for mass unrest led to their imprisonment in 1916.

In late 1918, inspired by events in Bolshevik Russia, Luxemburg and Liebknecht called for the transfer of power to workers and soldiers' soviets (councils). To help make this a reality, the pair founded the Communist Party of Germany.

In January 1919, thousands of striking workers brought Berlin to a standstill. The German communists seized control of the situation, occupying important government and communications buildings. Through editorials in the communist newspaper, *The Red Flag*, Luxemburg called for a violent takeover by the working class. Meanwhile, the republic's officials, decamped in Weimar,

16 JANUARY 27 BC

The Roman Senate confers the title 'Augustus' (meaning 'venerable') on **Octavian Caesar**. The title stretches back to Rome's ancient traditions, allowing him to claim that he is 'restoring' the republic following decades of turmoil.



Mourners attend Rosa Luxemburg's funeral in Berlin, June 1919. Luxemburg (inset) had called for a violent takeover of power by Germany's working class

mobilised Freikorps, paramilitary groups of disgruntled ex-soldiers with a visceral revulsion to leftwing politics, to crush the so-called 'Spartacist Revolt'.

Freikorps troops captured Luxemburg and Liebknecht in Berlin on the evening of 15 January. After being tortured, Luxemburg was guided to a car waiting to take her to prison. Before she could enter, one of her captors bashed his rifle butt on her head and another shot her dead. Luxemburg's body was dumped into the Landwehr Canal where it was recovered five months later.

In what is believed to be one of the last things she wrote, a defiant Luxemburg had scoffed: "'Order reigns in Berlin! You stupid henchmen! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will already 'raise itself with a rattle' and announce with fanfare, to your terror: I was, I am, I will be!"

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



Muslim ruler Boabdil (bottom left) offers the keys to the city of Granada to Isabella I and Ferdinand II, as depicted in a reproduction of a scene from a choir stall in Toledo Cathedral

2 JANUARY 1492

Spain's last Muslim ruler is toppled

The final Islamic kingdom on the Iberian peninsula succumbs to the Catholic monarchs

“**T**hese are the keys to paradise.” With these words, Spain's last Muslim ruler, Muhammad XII, is said to have surrendered the city of Granada to Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon on 2 January 1492.

The 'Reconquista' (reconquest) of the Iberian peninsula for Christianity, after almost eight centuries of Islamic rule, had finally triumphed. Muhammad XII (better known as Boabdil) was forced to quit the spectacular Alhambra fortress, perched over Granada, never to return.

Leaving the city, Boabdil reputedly turned back, sighed wearily, and broke down into tears. Meanwhile, his steely

mother mocked: “You do well, my son, to cry like a woman for what you couldn't defend like a man.”

For nearly eight centuries, al-Andalus had been home to a relatively tolerant society where Muslims, Christians and Jews had lived side-by-side. Weeks after their victory, Isabella and Ferdinand imposed the Alhambra Decree, banning Jews from Spain, while Muslims were later forced to convert to Christianity. Pope Alexander VI later bestowed the title *Católicos* on Isabella and Ferdinand in recognition of their piety. **E**

Danny Bird is staff writer on *BBC History Magazine*

Hollow ancient trees have hosted dinner parties, and served as preachers' pulpits and bullpens – and it's even said 39 people once fit inside the trunk of the Bowthorpe Oak in Lincolnshire!

Why do trunks become hollow?

A hollowing trunk is often natural. The centre of the tree is deadwood, which fungi slowly decays. Trees spend years storing minerals in this wood, and as it decays, they're released and used again. So, along with the annual supply of leaves and decaying branches, the hollowing trunk provides the tree with recycled nutrients, helping it to live longer.

Hollow trunks allow trees to bend in high winds, and they provide habitats for wildlife, as they offer protection from extreme weather and a constant temperature. They can be nesting or roosting sites for bats and birds, while the cavernous spaces at the foot are ideal for hibernating hedgehogs or snakes laying eggs. In addition to fungi, epiphytes and invertebrates colonise hollowing trees too.

It's also worth noting, some ancient trees are protected by fencing to prevent further compaction of the soil, so please steer clear if fencing is present.

Famous hollow trees

- **The Borrowdale Yews**, Cumbria, were celebrated by Wordsworth in his 1803 poem, *Yew Trees*. The largest is more than 7m in girth and can hold four people.
- **The Marten Oak**, Cheshire, was referred to as the largest tree in England in 1880. Over the years, it has served as a bullpen, a pigsty and a Wendy house.
- **The Crowhurst Yew**, Surrey, is a churchyard tree that has a door built into its trunk. In 1850 it housed a table and benches.
- **The Pulpit Yew**, Denbighshire, Wales, has a lectern. Steps lead through it to a podium where legend has it John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, once preached.

Help protect ancient trees

The UK has thousands of ancient trees – volunteers have recorded more than 180,000 for the Ancient Tree Inventory. Our oldest, some around 1,000 years old, are important for our heritage and vital for wildlife, yet they don't have the protection they need.

The Woodland Trust is working hard to ensure they're valued and safeguarded in the same way as listed buildings or ancient monuments are. By becoming a member, you can support this work, helping these living legends to survive for generations to come.

The inside story

Stand in an ancient tree and you're standing inside a piece of history. That's why the Woodland Trust wants to protect them – and you can help



THE CONVERSATION

EXPERTS DEBATE HISTORY'S BIGGEST ISSUES

ILLUSTRATION BY **HUGH COWLING**

BEHIND THE NEWS

The ex factor

David Cameron's recent appointment as foreign secretary raised eyebrows among politicians and public alike. But, as **RICHARD TOYE** explains, he's far from the first former prime minister to enjoy a post-number-10 cabinet career

Rishi Sunak's decision to appoint David Cameron as foreign secretary on 13 November sparked widespread surprise – even shock. This was partly because Cameron's time in number 10 Downing Street left a controversial legacy – including the fallout from the Brexit referendum – from which Sunak had earlier distanced himself in an effort to present himself as the 'change' candidate. But it was also because today we don't usually expect former prime ministers to return from the political grave. Yet there are plenty of examples from earlier eras of ex-PMs who, having seemingly left the limelight, went on to enjoy successful second acts.

The first point to note is that a significant number of premiers, having lost office once, returned as prime minister. The first holder of that role is generally considered to have been Robert Walpole, who acted as de-facto PM between 1721 and 1742. Of the 56 men and women who have followed him, 17 had two or more non-consecutive terms; 15 of these having held office before 1940. In the period before universal suffrage was achieved in 1928, changes of government often hinged less on the vicissitudes of public opinion than on the shifting balance of forces within parliament, and sometimes on the monarch's relationship with the resident of number 10. A prime minister who lost power was not necessarily terminally discredited; it could make sense for them to bide time, waiting for the chance to return.

For example, William Pitt the Younger served from 1783 to 1801, then again from 1804 to 1806, when he died in office. Lord John Russell established the record for the longest gap between prime ministerial terms, serving 1846–52 and again 1865–66. The only prime minister to have served four non-consecutive terms (1868–74, 1880–85, 1886 and 1892–94) was William Ewart Gladstone. In the modern era, Winston Churchill was defeated in the general election of July

// A prime minister who loses power is not always terminally discredited; they can wait for the chance to return //

1945 and lost a further election in 1950 but won the following year, serving as PM until his retirement in 1955. Harold Wilson was the last to serve non-consecutive terms, in 1964–70 and 1974–76. Given the turmoil in recent politics, we might speculate that, had he not given up his Commons seat shortly after stepping down as prime minister, Cameron could now be eyeing a return to Downing Street rather than serving in the lesser role from the House of Lords.

Settling for second

It may seem surprising that, like Cameron, so many who once held the top place were later willing to accept subordinate positions. Certainly, some ex-premiers – such as the Liberal HH Asquith – regarded offers of lesser posts as insulting. But Asquith himself had in 1915 recruited a Conservative predecessor to his cabinet: Arthur Balfour, whose short premiership (1902–05) was rather unsuccessful, and who was later forced out of the Tory leadership. However, he was an experienced figure with a willingness to work across party lines.

When the political upheavals of the First World War forced Asquith to form a coalition, Balfour was a logical choice as First Lord of the Admiralty, the minister in charge of the Royal Navy. Second only to Asquith in the cabinet hierarchy, Balfour thus outranked Andrew Bonar Law, the official leader of the Conservative Party. The following year, Asquith was displaced by David Lloyd George, who made Balfour foreign secretary in his new coalition.

In 1917, with the agreement of the cabinet, Balfour issued his famous declaration stating in part that: "His Majesty's Government view

with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." In 1919, he became Lord President of the Council, and finally stood down as a cabinet minister 10 years later, at the age of 80.

The Lord Presidency did not come with departmental responsibilities but, in the right hands, it could be a powerful role – one held by three further ex-prime ministers. The first of these was Stanley Baldwin, who occupied the post in the early 1930s as a member of the cross-party National Government under Ramsay MacDonald – and, arguably, was the real power behind MacDonald's throne. As that PM's health declined, Baldwin worked hard to maintain the cohesion of the government, and in 1935, with an election on the horizon, Baldwin and MacDonald simply swapped jobs. MacDonald, by that stage a broken man, was kept in the cabinet largely because, as a former Labour figure, he helped the government maintain its thinning 'National' veneer.

Neville Chamberlain also ended his career as Lord President after he was forced out as prime minister in May 1940, remaining in Churchill's war cabinet for several months in that role. He stayed on as leader of the Conservative Party, too, placing him in a powerful position – and putting Churchill's premiership at risk – as the military situation deteriorated. Churchill also wanted to recruit another of his former bosses, Lloyd George, but was unsuccessful – in part because of the 'Welsh Wizard's' refusal to serve with Chamberlain, whom he loathed. "I have received a very great deal of help from Chamberlain," Churchill told

GETTY IMAGES



Robert Walpole, effectively Britain's first prime minister for more than two decades from 1721. Seventeen of his successors returned to the top job after a hiatus



Winston Churchill on the campaign trail before the 1945 election in which his party was ousted from government. He was voted back as prime minister in 1951



David Cameron joins a cabinet meeting on 14 November, having been appointed foreign secretary by Rishi Sunak the previous day. His return to frontline politics was met with surprise

Lloyd George. “His kindness and courtesy to me in our new relations have touched me. I have joined hands with him and must act with perfect loyalty.” Nevertheless, Churchill may well have breathed a sigh of relief when Chamberlain, suffering from cancer, finally stood down.

Home again

The most recent precedent for Cameron’s appointment dates back more than 50 years. Lord Home served as foreign secretary in Harold Macmillan’s Conservative government and then, when Macmillan resigned in 1963, emerged as his surprise successor. Becoming prime minister required him to disclaim his peerage and fight a by-election.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home, as he became, served only a year in number 10 before being narrowly defeated in the general election of 1964. In 1970, Edward Heath, his replacement as Tory leader, gave him the

// Many former PMs have served in cabinet roles with distinction, and for substantial periods of time //

top job in the Foreign Office. Home showed decisiveness with the expulsion of 105 alleged Soviet spies, which did not damage UK–USSR relations as much as many had expected. He brought experience to a relatively untried cabinet, and ran his department with competence at a time of domestic and international turbulence.

Sunak must be hoping that Cameron will be an equally cool head.

Lord Rosebery, briefly prime minister in the 1890s, once wrote that having an ex-premier in the cabinet is “a fleeting and dangerous luxury”. However, as we have seen, many former PMs have served in cabinet roles with distinction, and for substantial periods of time. Given the current stage in the electoral cycle, Cameron’s appointment may well prove fleeting, though it is not obviously dangerous. The question remains as to whether Sunak will ever enjoy the luxury of appointing Cameron’s replacement. **H**



Richard Toye is professor of history at the University of Exeter. You can read his article about the first Labour government on page 32



Tragic couple Elizabeth Debicki as Diana, Princess of Wales and Khalid Abdalla as Dodi Fayed, whose untimely deaths dominate *The Crown's* final run

HISTORY ON SCREEN

Behind palace doors

As the final season of the hit Netflix series *The Crown* reaches our screens, the show's head of research, **ANNIE SULZBERGER**, speaks to Elinor Evans about the importance and process of interrogating power

The final season of *The Crown* charts the story of the royal family from 1997 to 2005. Are there any unique challenges of telling the stories of living royals, and of the Windsor dynasty in particular?

Sometimes the biggest issue is our collective memory, because we remember things in the moment. If, for example, you asked the public today how many people died in the car crash that killed Diana, Princess of Wales and Dodi Fayed, they would say two. In fact, there were three – but that third victim got little coverage in the newspapers.

Most of the information about the crash did not come out until 2008, when Operation Paget [the Metropolitan Police inquiry established in 2004 to investigate conspiracy theories surrounding Diana's death] was published. All of a sudden, you could rebuild that entire summer through very credible testimony from close friends, bodyguards and the Ritz staff who went with Dodi to buy the ring that we feature in the series.

We needed those 10 years of investigations to get to the fundamental material with which to build our story. If we had

stopped in 1997, and used only resources from then, pretty much what you would have been stuck with is the emotional responses to a moment in history, because that's all we had at the time. But nobody had quite figured out truly what had happened, and what Diana was feeling about Dodi.

I think sometimes collective memory can be a harder thing to deal with when it comes to the monarchy, because they don't often do interviews themselves. We get most of our information from newspapers, vox pops, and the public at large – but that is not how you attempt to piece together history.

This is one of the reasons why our show stops in 2005. You need to allow time for the true story of those moments to emerge. If we were still depicting the story up to 2023, we would only have today's newspapers or interviews to help us shape the narrative.

Why do you think the royal family are fair game for portrayal on programmes such as *The Crown*?

I believe that in any democracy – which we have in the UK, even though it is a

constitutional monarchy – we have the right to interrogate our public institutions, and the monarchy is a public institution. I find it interesting that nobody has a problem with us depicting Harold Wilson, John Major or Margaret Thatcher, yet some people feel that the royal family are untouchable. I simply don't believe that's true. If these two spheres of power are meant to function together, then we have to treat them equally.

I feel a great responsibility to understand those people as well as I possibly can. But where that's taken is not up to me – I'm not the writer of the show – but it's my job to feel that I've left an impression of a person as rooted in history as possible. That's hard, because it's not just history – it's perspective. But it's rooted in as much information as we can gather and confidently put forward.

The show takes us into Downing Street at various points across the 20th and 21st centuries. How do you go about reconstructing life and events behind those closed doors?

The National Archives holds cabinet agendas and minutes, so we know exactly what was covered in every cabinet meeting. And lots of people who worked as cabinet members or civil servants within Downing Street have written memoirs or published diaries – they've gone home that night and written about what happened. During Tony Blair's time as prime minister, [Downing Street press secretary and, later, director of communications and strategy] Alastair Campbell took unbelievable notes about every day that he was at Downing Street. Earlier, you had Bernard Donoughue [who published diaries spanning several Labour



// I don't think I'd have been able to look up the way in which two posh people would have eaten asparagus in 1992 //

governments] and others. A lot of PMs write autobiographies, and a lot of historians write well-vetted biographies.

The reporting of government has a less gossipy nature [than some other media coverage]. So you might say, well, we know *The Guardian* will always slant this way, and *The Daily Telegraph* will slant that way. But whatever the outlet, you can trust an official account that says, for example, this many items have been presented for the budget.

The variety of characters and storylines portrayed in *The Crown* is one of the elements that's allowed people to connect with the series. Do you have a favourite you'd like viewers to think about more closely?

If I had to choose a favourite episode, it would be that in which Charles goes to Aberystwyth University [in 1969, to learn Welsh ahead of his investiture as Prince of Wales], exploring his relationship with his Welsh tutor, Edward Millward. We were fortunate to speak to Edward's daughter, who acted as a conduit to him – he was very ill at the time we were researching.

More broadly, that episode looked at the dangers Charles was facing during a Welsh militant bombing campaign. There were accounts that he was given a bulletproof vest



Royal duty Princess Elizabeth with the Duke of Edinburgh on a visit to Kenya in February 1952. It was here that she heard the news of her father's death

to wear underneath his investiture uniform, because the threat of assassination was so high. However, we realised that the real story wasn't about the outside political forces on Charles, but about his evolution under the tutelage of someone with whom he had a new kind of dynamic. It became such a simple story about a young man's growth and awakening.

Those scenes where he's with the Millwards highlight the family life he wished he'd had – that closeness – and the sense of isolation he experienced back home. It was such a simple, beautiful story, and we could never have got anywhere near that depth without the Millward family's help.

Are there any historical details that captured your interest but were left on the cutting room floor?

Lots of small things that we spent hours researching didn't make the final edit, or were simply brushed past in a scene. I spent a lot of time checking which medals the tribal leaders wore when Elizabeth landed in Kenya in 1952, for example, trying to figure out how this religious leader of Zanzibar got a [particular] medal. And then, by the time it was actually filmed, it was just a flash-in-the-pan moment.

In one scene, Dominic West [the actor who plays Charles in the final two seasons] was eating asparagus at Highgrove. Our amazing etiquette adviser, David Rankin Hunt, stopped him and said: posh people don't eat asparagus with knives and forks – they use their fingers. So we reset and reshot it with Dom picking up the asparagus with his fingers. It's important to have so

many voices who can chime in with their experience, because I don't think I would have been able to look up the way in which two posh people would have eaten asparagus back in 1992.

Finally, could you share your sense of the place of history as drama in 2023?

If done correctly, it's incredibly elucidating. It's not journalism, it's not on-the-ground reporting – but it's how we digest our past to help us understand the moment we're in, or where we're going.

It's really important to have creative freedom when you're making historical drama, because I fundamentally think that – in the same way that Hilary Mantel said in her Reith Lectures – history has long been about a very small percentage of the population written by an even smaller percentage of the population. It's about aligning perspectives to try to build a picture, and it's a lot more subjective than people are willing to acknowledge.

As an example, the Second World War in Europe ended in May 1945. That's a concrete fact – but how victorious Britain felt at that time, or how individuals in the war felt, all of that is perspective. So I wish a show such as this was taken less as documentary and more as a way to help us process the people in our lives about whom we actually don't know very much, but who are in positions of power, and as a way to try to humanise them and our history. **H**

Annie Sulzberger is head of research for *The Crown*. The final episodes of the series are available to watch on Netflix now



Jason Watkins as Harold Wilson in a scene from the third season. Political and royal figures are equally worthy of dramatisation, argues Annie Sulzberger

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// Little did I suspect that Bede's story might come to life so vividly //

IN NOVEMBER, AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY was quietly announced by Suffolk County Council: an unprepossessing rectangular structure, marked by post holes in a farmer's field. Nothing special, you might have thought – but for all who are fascinated by Anglo-Saxon history, it was thrilling.

The find was made at Rendlesham, five miles from the site of Britain's greatest archaeological discovery, the ship burial at Sutton Hoo. Readers may have seen the 2021 Netflix film about that site, *The Dig*, featuring Ralph Fiennes' sly, canny portrait of Basil Brown, the self-taught Suffolk archaeologist who first uncovered the ship burial before the excavation was taken over by the posh 'professionals' from London and Cambridge. There were a few jarring notes in the film – not least the relegation of Peggy Piggott to a walk-on part, when in fact she was already an experienced archaeologist by the time of the 1939 dig. However, though fictionalised, the film is a very evocative piece of English pastoral: digging in the Suffolk soil as a Spitfire flies low over the river Deben at Woodbridge, in that last summer before the world changed forever.

A related story was told by Bede, writing in the 720s, looking back to the moment of Gregory the Great's Christian mission in 597 – for the great historian monk, almost within living memory. Rendlesham, he says, was the residence of Rædwald, king of the East Angles, who reigned from around 599 and was overlord of the Anglo-Saxon kings of his day. We can imagine Rædwald's royal hall as being like Heorot ('Stag Hall') in *Beowulf*, "the greatest of halls... wondrous and gleaming". Here

the king would have feasted his followers, entertained by bards singing songs about the ancient heroes; here he would have greeted ambassadors, received tribute from his subkings, meted out justice.

Later, so Bede says, it was here that Bishop Cedd baptised Swithhelm, king of Essex, in the presence of the king of the East Angles. Clearly, there was by then a Christian church at Rendlesham – maybe on the site of today's huge parish church, dedicated to Gregory the Great, which looms over farm fields on a low ridge above the A12. But in the 610s and 620s, England was still a semi-pagan world; it was a time of "no longer and not yet". Bede tells us that Rædwald had accepted Christian baptism but, hedging his bets – perhaps testing the auspiciousness of a new god who might turn out to be as powerful as Thor and Woden – Rædwald had in his shrine both an altar to Christ and one for pagan sacrifice.

Rædwald died c624, and most historians think that he was the man buried in the great ship at Sutton Hoo. Though the treasure excavated there included Christian signs (baptismal spoons, for example), a boat burial in a pagan grave field going back to the sixth century suggests that the king still wanted to be interred with his pagan ancestors – and their gods.

The Sutton Hoo site was re-excavated in the 1990s, and has probably now given up most of its secrets, but the wider landscape has only begun to be explored. Autumn 2022 brought great excitement when a new dig at Rendlesham found the post holes of a royal hall, 23 metres long – surely the footings of Rædwald's hall, standing inside a royal enclosure surrounded by a ditch and palisade nearly a mile long. This must be the residence of the kings buried in the Sutton Hoo mounds from the 570s to the 630s.

The new discovery announced in November homes in on Bede's story. It is a structure measuring 10 metres by 5, with deep foundations, "unusually high and robustly built", according to the supervising archaeologist, Professor Christopher Scull. Perhaps, dare one imagine, it was constructed with wooden staves like early Scandinavian churches. Bede says that the temple of the East Anglian kings survived for quite some time after they converted to Christianity, writing that "in our own day King Ealdwulf says he saw it when he was a boy". Is this that temple?

No doubt more tests and further examination of the site will clarify the picture. But it is already very exciting – and, for anyone who has fallen under the spell of Anglo-Saxon history, it offers a fascinating glimpse into that world. Little did I suspect when I struggled with Bede's Latin at university that his story might come to life so vividly. But of course history is always, in the end, the story of people – and here again we meet them head on. **H**

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series, and is the author of several books including a new edition of *In Search of the Dark Ages* (BBC Books, 2022). He is on X at @mayavision

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HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on how historical conflicts haunt the wars of today

// Amid conflict, historians are needed to explain the complex roots of strife //

Kavita Puri

is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4 whose history series include *Three Pounds in My Pocket*. She is also the author of *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (Bloomsbury, 2019)



IN JUNE 1989, SERBIAN PRESIDENT SLOBODAN Milošević delivered a speech at Gazimestan, a monument near the town of Kosovo Polje standing close to the site known as the Field of Blackbirds. This watchtower, not far from Kosovo's capital, Pristina, marks the site of the battle of Kosovo – an event that occupies a unique position in Serbia's national story.

Fought on 15 June 1389, that battle saw Serb forces attempting to fight off an invading Ottoman army. The bloody clash left the leaders of the opposing armies – Ottoman sultan Murad I and Serbian ruler Prince Lazar – among the thousands of dead on both sides. Milošević's speech commemorated the 600th anniversary of the battle, against a background of rising tension between ethnic Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. He mooted the possibility of "armed battles" in Serbia's future national development. Less than two years later, the Yugoslav Wars erupted.

Fast forward nearly 10 years, and Yugoslavia had disintegrated following the worst conflicts in Europe since the Second World War, during which Serbia attempted to

ethnically cleanse Kosovo of its Albanian population. Only after Nato intervened in 1999 did the fighting end.

Back then, I read everything I could find to understand what was happening – and this battle kept coming up. In his 1998 book *Kosovo: A Short History*, Noel Malcolm writes: "The significance of this battle to the Serbian people is not to be measured simply in terms of its politico-strategic consequences. The story of the battle... has become a totem or talisman of Serbian identity, so that this event has a status unlike that of anything else in the history of the Serbs."

There is much that is disputed about the events of June 1389, often depending on whether they're viewed from a Serbian or ethnic Albanian perspective. The competing narratives – and the myths and fears generated by the battle of Kosovo – show how historical events can take on significance in a version of a national story, and can even be a factor in triggering new wars centuries later.

That's why, to understand the conflict in Kosovo in 1999, I first needed to understand what happened at the Field of Blackbirds six centuries earlier, and how it shaped Milošević's nationalist rhetoric. And that's why it's impossible to understand today's conflicts – such as the war in the Middle East, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Armenia-Azerbaijan fight over Nagorno-Karabakh – without first comprehending their often complex histories.

Untangling the past can feel monumental as an outsider. If you glance at social media, everyone seems to be an armchair historian. But historians (and journalists) are required, perhaps more than ever before, to explain these troubled histories, evaluating the evidence, being transparent about biases, and leaning into complexity.

For the people living through these conflicts, something else is at play – something that can be hard for interested onlookers to fully understand. This is personal. In their own family histories – maybe absorbed directly from relatives, or from accounts passed down over many generations – these are stories laden with fear, trauma, loss, hurt and displacement.

Such sentiments can be amplified at times of crisis – as the current conflict in the Middle East shows. For Israelis and the Jewish diaspora, it may touch the memory of a grandparent lost to the Holocaust, or expelled from Arab countries in the 20th century. As for Palestinians, it may remind them of ancestors who fought during the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, and of their lost homelands.

It's vital that we understand the history and the geopolitics – as well as the emotions of all sides. At times like these, the purpose and responsibility of the historian has never been more important. **H**



A miniature of the 1389 battle of Kosovo. This clash between Serb and Ottoman forces generated myths and fears that were still shaping European geopolitics six centuries after it was fought



A painting of Richard II receiving his bride, Isabella, from Charles VI of France, to whom reader David Pymmer is distantly related

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Mistaken identity?

The painting selected to illustrate William Shakespeare in the December issue (*Encounters*) is captioned:

“A c1610 painting of William Shakespeare, kept in the Cobbe Collection, is thought to be the only portrait of the English playwright to have been taken from life.”

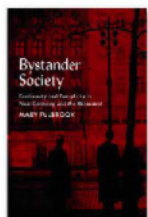
However, the Cobbe portrait (left) has never been proven to depict Shakespeare – and, in all likeli-



hood, doesn't. Research by Tarnya Cooper, former chief curator of the National Portrait Gallery, has shown that it is almost certainly a painting of the poet Sir Thomas Overbury, a contemporary of Shakespeare's. Compare the Cobbe portrait to the portrait of Overbury by the Flemish painter Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger and there is very little doubt that they portray the same sitter.

The only confirmed portraits of Shakespeare that exist today are the Droeshout portrait, which appears in the First Folio, and the bust on his funerary monument in Stratford-upon-Avon. Even the famous Chandos portrait, which is more widely accepted to depict the bard, has never been definitively proven. However, the scarcely publicised Sanders portrait, which bears a contemporary label identifying the subject as a 39-year-old Shakespeare, has one of the best claims to being a painting of the playwright 'taken from life'.

Frederick Clifford, Newcastle-upon-Tyne



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **Bystander Society: Conformity and Complicity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust** by Mary Fullbrook. You can read our review on page 70

Napoleon: complex character...

Napoleon was not the 19th-century equivalent of the dictators who dominated the 20th (*The Many Faces of Napoleon*, Christmas).

Although autocratic, he restored order after the chaos of the revolution without recourse to a police state, and laid the groundwork for a political system that has survived to today. He also showed toleration: when he occupied Malta in 1798, he abolished slavery and feudal privileges, while Jews were given equal rights to Christians.

His wars cost an immense number of lives, yet the vast majority of those conflicts were forced upon him by the monarchical states of Europe, who feared losing their privileges. Unlike those psychopaths Hitler and Stalin, he was a truly great military commander, praised by Wellington as the greatest since Caesar. Also unlike them, his letters to the women in his life show a romantic man, often suffering from self-doubt.

Although his later career saw his original ideals often undermined by the reality of power, his letters and writings make it clear that he was a believer in the principles of the French Revolution – while Hitler was essentially a nihilist and Stalin a vicious tyrant. Napoleon's army loved him, while those of the latter were motivated by fear.

Colin Bullen, Kent

...or murderous monster?

Napoleon was a tyrant and dictator who claimed his income was “100,000 men a year” in his forays to conquer Europe. Across the 15 years of his heyday, that amounted to one and a half million soldiers, who in turn killed many more. It's estimated that more than half a million French soldiers died in the Russian campaign of 1812 alone, as they slaughtered their way to Moscow. Millions of civilians were killed in the Napoleonic Wars as his armies rampaged across Europe.

When winning, he was eulogised like Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great and Hitler. Must human history be a continuous tale of mass murder?

Derek Smith, London

In defence of the British empire

Yet another sly dig at the British empire, this time in the interview with Al Murray about his new series *Why Does Everyone Hate the British Empire?* (*History on the Box*, December). Why are the British empire's detractors, including Murray, afforded the opportunity to give the impression that it was predominantly bad but with a few grudgingly admitted not-too-bad features?

If the British empire had never existed, the world would have no doubt consisted of the Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Mughal and Ottoman empires – and who's to say these wouldn't have been worse for indigenous inhabitants than that of Britain?

Also, the way that the British empire expanded wasn't via a series of invasions by rapacious troops of peaceful, agrarian peoples' lands, but instead more through an expansion of trading posts and alliances with locals, as described by Tirthankar Roy in his book *An Economic History of India 1707–1857*. Indeed, the modern nation of India – a part of the world that suffered, according to [Indian historian] KS Lal, the loss of 80 million people between the years 1000 and 1525 due to murderous Afghan and Mughal invasions – wouldn't have existed without the British unifying it and endowing it with a language that unites all Indians, whether they speak Hindi, Tamil or Malayalam.

The British empire may have had its bad times, but I maintain that, compared to other empires, it was one of the most benign.

David Piggott, Worcestershire

The king of comedy

I read with much interest and pleasure the interview with David Mitchell about his new book *Unruly: A History of England's Kings and Queens* (*Books Interview*, December). This new book is on my Christmas list!

The lengthy process of tracing my family

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➤ Page 44



Napoleon and his troops endure the Russian winter in this 19th-century painting. Readers Colin Bullen and Derek Smith offer contrasting views of the leader's character

tree revealed that we are directly descended from Charles VI of France, who was roundly defeated at Agincourt by Henry V. Of course, I am no more royal than anyone else, but at the age of 80, I am indulgent enough to glory in having lived through three reigns and to wallow in having lived at the same time as people such as David Mitchell, whose erudition and comic genius I so admire.

Mitchell's view that our royalty was, for the most part, descended from "thieving thugs" is mostly accurate. However, a glance at other regimes reveals that republics, empires, soviets and so on have been no different: all were human and suffered from the usual human frailties. If we accept that nothing is perfect, then the ordinary person must decide which of these systems has been better. As a committed royalist, I am obviously on the side of the UK system.

I very much look forward to reading David Mitchell's book. I am certain it will reflect all his comic brilliance.

David Pym, Essex

You can take it with you...

Emperor Hirohito of Japan didn't just sport a Mickey Mouse watch (*Cartoon Century*, December), he was buried with it. He was just one of many celebrities who have been buried with items of seemingly limited market value but nevertheless full of

significance for them. For actor Bela Lugosi, it was his Dracula cape; for Roald Dahl, pencils and chocolate; for Bob Marley, marijuana; and for Humphrey Bogart, a whistle in memory of a scene with Lauren Bacall in the 1944 film *To Have and Have Not*. And, of course, Frank Sinatra did not leave without a bottle of Jack Daniel's whiskey.

Ian MacDonald, Essex

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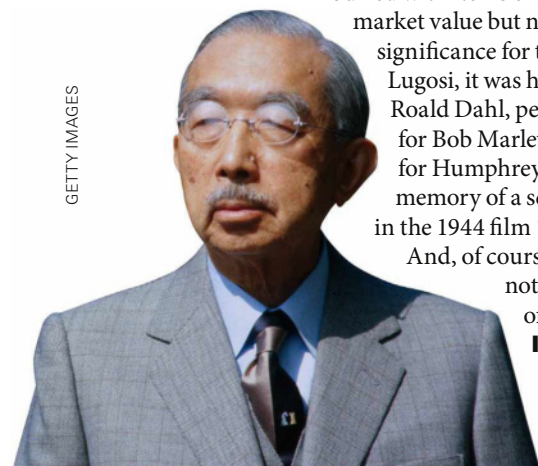
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Shakespeare: playing with the past

To mark the 400th anniversary of the publication of the *First Folio* compiling Shakespeare's dramas, we spoke to eight experts about what his plays reveal about themes including love, death, power and money

INTERVIEWS BY **MATT ELTON** AND **ELLIE CAWTHORNE**

Historical drama

Shakespeare, depicted in a later image based on a contemporary portrait. His dramatic works shed light on Elizabethan and Jacobean society, and on views of history



Titus Andronicus and ideas of racial difference

by Rebecca Adusei

At the start of *Titus Andronicus* – one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, believed to have been written around 1590 – the protagonist, Roman general Titus, returns home after fighting the Goths. What then follows is a violent story of death, racism, cannibalism and mutilation.

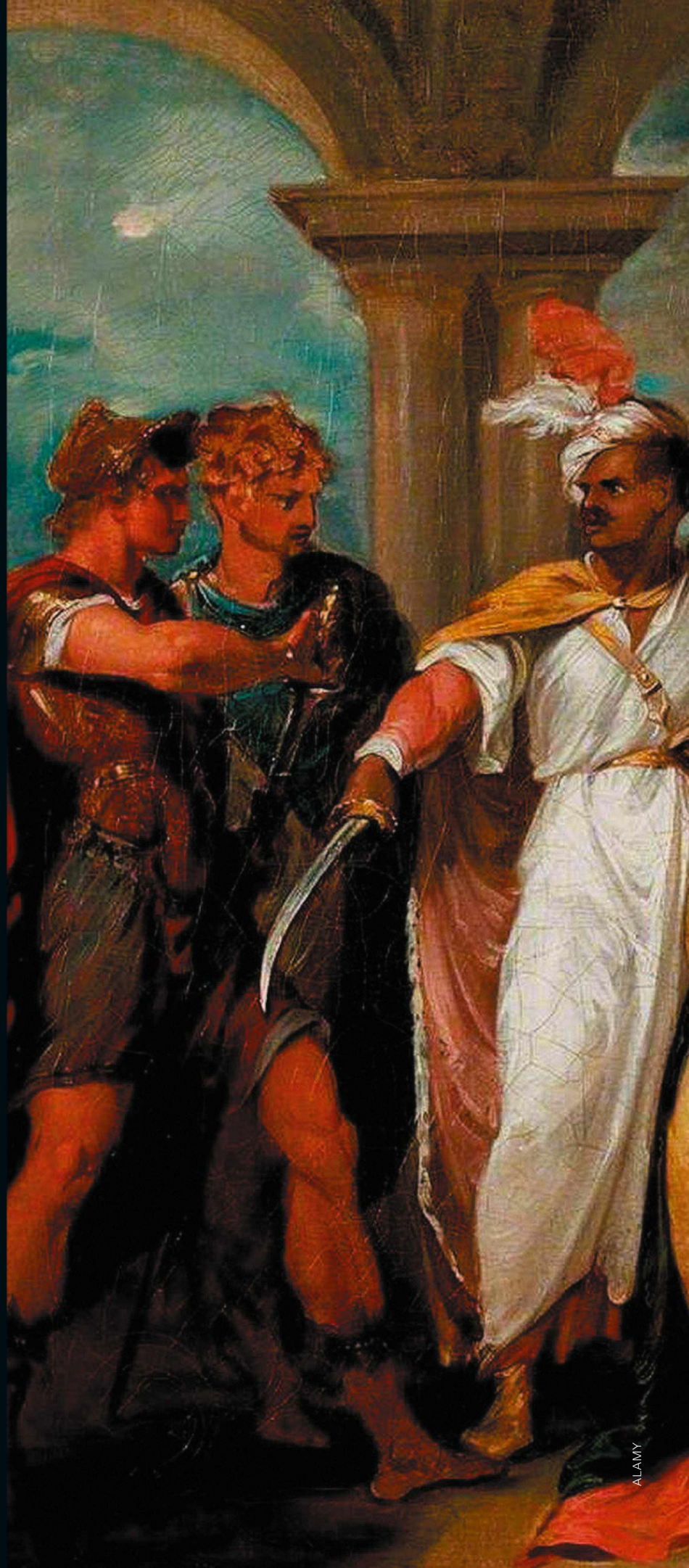
The idea of race infuses the play entirely. Although Shakespeare presents his characters as being in two tiers – the Romans, and the people seen as 'the other' – even that portrayal is multifaceted. The character of Tamora, for instance, is queen of the Goths, a people repeatedly characterised in the play as barbarous. Yet she has an ability to infiltrate and move within Roman society because of her whiteness, and is chosen by the emperor Saturninus to be his wife.

Tamora has autonomy and agency, freedoms that were not afforded to her lover, 'Aaron the Moor'. The intercultural relationship between Tamora and Saturninus would have been more palatable to early modern audiences, because it was believed that the Goths were ancestors of the English. The idea of Tamora and Aaron together, however, may have made those audiences feel uncomfortable.

By the turn of the 17th century, black characters were commonplace on the stage. Around that time, Europeans were increasingly encountering people from sub-Saharan Africa, a development reflected in the growing numbers of black characters that appeared in dramatic works. Possibly the earliest example appears in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, written around 1587 – so pre-dates Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.

The early modern theatre industry generated a lot of revenue, and playwrights such as Shakespeare and Marlowe had vested economic stakes in the industry, so they had strong motivations to include excitement and novelty in their plays. One way of doing so was to feature black characters (played by white actors in blackface) to provide visual spectacle and, in some instances, as figures of fear. In *Titus Andronicus*, for instance, Aaron is a direct catalyst for the violence and tragedy that runs throughout the play. Shakespeare was reinforcing a particular view of black masculinity that depicted black men as aggressive and sexually driven, and in some cases as evil and sinister.

Rebecca Adusei is a PhD student at King's College London, analysing depictions and characterisations of sub-Saharan Africans in early modern literature and drama



A c1796 painting of a scene from *Titus Andronicus* featuring the 'Moor' Aaron. In the play, Shakespeare was "reinforcing a particular view of black masculinity", says Rebecca Adusei

Romeo and Juliet and the experiences of youth and young love

by **Sophie Duncan**

It's fascinating that Shakespeare chose to make the protagonists of this play so scandalously young, even by the standards of the 16th century. Unusually, he specifies that Juliet is not yet 14 years of age – it's clear he wants us to take note of that point.

The story itself is an old one, though Shakespeare's most recent source was a 1562 poem by Arthur Brooke, whose Juliet is 16. However, unlike Brooke – who paints the couple as naughty, libidinous teenagers – Shakespeare ultimately views the tragic teens as victims of their families' fatal feud.

We tend to think of the teenager as an invention of the 20th century but, even in Shakespeare's day, parenting manuals were produced to explain the changes adolescents go through and advise how to keep teenagers on the straight and narrow. Shakespeare himself is pretty astute about teenage boys: the play explores gang warfare, and its male romantic hero is also its most violent character.

In the 20th century, *Romeo and Juliet* became a launchpad for discussions about the teenage experience, and that emphasis on rebelliousness and gang identity grew ever more prominent as overt teen culture

developed. The most famous adaptation of Shakespeare's play, the musical *West Side Story*, was inspired by reports of teenage gang violence in New York. In general, though, Shakespeare himself appears to have been on the side of the young.

Romeo and Juliet has become a byword for the ultimate love story. Because of this, the extreme youth of its title characters is sometimes overlooked. If we focus on the fact that they're so young, though, the story becomes less about pure romance and more a picture of teen infatuation – a kind of Elizabethan *Twilight*. In many ways, it's quite toxic, invoking seductive but unsustainable ideas of 'us against the world' and 'true love hurts'. If the protagonists were older, there would be ordinary life to grapple with: Romeo would have an estate to manage, and Juliet would be running a household. In fact, during their longest sequence together on stage, one of them is either dead or unconscious. In short, it's a very atypical relationship that has become a curious kind of template for romance.

.....
Sophie Duncan is a research fellow at Magdalen College, University of Oxford



A scene from the 1961 film adaptation of *West Side Story*, which was inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare's play has become "a curious kind of template for romance", argues Sophie Duncan

The Merchant of Venice and the human cost of capitalism

by **Emma Smith**

The Elizabethan theatre was a crucible for exploring changing ideas, including those about the economy. Shakespeare focuses on such ideas in *The Merchant of Venice*, with its concern about what was then a hot topic – what we'd now call capitalism. This was a moment of speculative enterprises and big profit, when the Merchant Adventurers, the Muscovy Company and the Virginia Company were exploring and exploiting the world's resources and bringing them back to London. That's what the merchant Antonio does in the play. As a result, he experiences a terrible moment when his fortunes are lost completely – reflecting the dangers of sea travel and the risks involved in that kind of investment.

Another fascinating, somewhat troubling and ambiguous figure is the Jewish moneylender Shylock. He helps people finance their operations or speculations, but is also despised by Antonio and his friends, who spurn him and call him a "dog". Commercial lending was first made legal in England in 1545, when the limit for interest rates on loans was 10 per cent. Shylock's outsider status as a Jewish person could be read as the play's attempt to scapegoat these emerging financial models in a single character who can be externalised and punished, but I think what Shakespeare ultimately shows is that this doesn't work. In fact, everybody in the play is implicated in this world of borrowing, lending and paying back at interest.

Capitalism is also highlighted in the play's romantic subplot. Most of Shakespeare's comedies revolve around courtship, but *The Merchant of Venice* is much more clear-sighted about the fact that upper-class Elizabethan marriages were affairs not of the heart but of the wallet. Bassanio describes the object of his affections, Portia, as wealthy before he even mentions her name, and borrows money from Shylock (via Antonio) to make himself appear wealthier in order to court her. He's a kind of scammer, taking out credit to make an investment on the basis that he can ultimately win a huge reward.

Shakespeare shows how capitalism affects – and infects – emotional relationships. There isn't a sphere of our lives that isn't influenced by money, as Shakespeare identified, with some prescience.

.....
Emma Smith is professor of Shakespeare studies at the University of Oxford

As Emma Smith notes, Bassanio (right) describes Portia (left) as wealthy "before he even mentions her name"



Henry V and the swirling currents of nationalism

by **Jerry Brotton**

Although the accuracy of the events depicted in *Henry V* is debated, it has a sound historical skeleton: the 15th-century battle of Agincourt and siege of Harfleur. But the play is, of course, drama rather than history, and Shakespeare wrote it for particular theatrical effect.

That's most notable in the inspiring speech that's delivered by Henry before Agincourt in 1415, featuring the much-quoted line: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers." We believe that the real Henry V may well have given a rousing speech before that battle, but Shakespeare obviously took a lot of poetic licence. And, as with other historical plays, these lines speak as much to the time in which they were written as they do to the past.

Henry V (c1599) completes a cycle of history plays Shakespeare had been writing since the beginning of his career. After that point, he focused more on tragedies and comedies, so we can see the play as both a

Macbeth and the challenges of kingship

by Paul Edmondson



The ghost of Banquo spooks Macbeth's court in this 19th-century painting. Shakespeare's tragedy is critical of tyrannical leadership

Shakespeare had explored kingship in many other plays before *Macbeth* (c1606). We know that he was writing to please James VI & I, who, from 1603, was the patron of the King's Men, the company for which Shakespeare was the leading playwright and in which he owned shares. We also know that in 1605 James saw a production of Matthew Gwinne's *Tres Sibyllae* (Three Sibyls), in which the title characters prophesy that the seed of Banquo – Macbeth's ally turned ghostly nemesis – will rule forever. James traced his ancestry back to the historical Banquo, so would have been delighted that Shakespeare's play hinted at the triumph of his ancestor's children.

In 1599, James wrote *Basilikon Doron* (*The King's Gifts*) – a kind of how-to-be-a-king book, which Shakespeare clearly read. (James was also interested in witchcraft, which also influenced Shakespeare's portrayal of the three weird sisters in *Macbeth*.) The book sees James differentiate between a true king and a tyrant: one acknowledges himself ordained for his people, having received from God a burden of government whereof he must be accountable, whereas the

other thinks his people ordained for him are prey to his appetites. We very much see the latter in *Macbeth*, which also features searing references to the state of Scotland under that tyrant's power.

Over time, productions of the play have increasingly focused on psychological realism, dramatising what it feels like to be a murderer and to be in a toxic marriage. That's unlike early versions: for example, Sir William Davenant's adaptation staged for Charles II, in which Macbeth is portrayed as analogous to Oliver Cromwell, and Malcolm (son of the murdered King Duncan) as Charles himself. Davenant very much used the play to present the politics of his time.

Kingship or queenship – as opposed to mere leadership – has a special meaning in Shakespeare's plays. Whatever we feel about monarchy, I think that *Macbeth* will endure as a story so long as power is being tested and challenged, and that productions of *Macbeth* will be staged underground in oppressive regimes throughout the world, as they have in dictatorships over the centuries.

Paul Edmondson is head of research for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

summation of his interest in English history and of his narrative of how Anglo-French rivalry culminated in Agincourt. That battle was particularly important for the Tudors, because the period saw the beginnings of a certain idea of 'Englishness'. So Shakespeare writing about these events of a century earlier would have had a particular power.

I've always been struck by the way in which figures in the English and French courts in the play talk about the English identity as being mixed. A later scene underscores the central problematic question: what is Englishness, in 1415 or even in 1599? At that time, there wasn't a sense of a 'pure' national identity. This wasn't a nation state, and the play's language is very much about absolutist sovereignty – about Tudor royal power.

At the time Shakespeare wrote *Henry V*, this was a disunited kingdom, at war with itself. There was infighting between the Scottish and the Welsh; the Tudors also pursued a brutal policy of colonial settlement in Ireland. So the play tells us about fractures of 1599 – which we may also recognise today.

Jerry Brotton is professor of Renaissance studies at Queen Mary University of London and author of *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (Allen Lane, 2016)



Characters from Shakespeare's *Henry V* rally in this 1859 watercolour. Though often claimed to be overtly nationalistic, Jerry Brotton argues that the play's message is more complex



Loïc Corbery as Hamlet and Georgia Scalliet as Ophelia in a 2022 production. The play has a "preoccupation with death", says Farah Karim-Cooper

Hamlet and society's renewed fears about mortality

by **Farah Karim-Cooper**

Views of death were in flux at the time Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, around the turn of the 17th century. Beliefs of the Catholic medieval world had been thrown into chaos by the Reformation, and that in turn had inspired a culture of questioning and doubt typified in Martin Luther's theses, to which Hamlet alludes.

In the Middle Ages, Catholics believed that, after death, you might go to purgatory, at which point surviving loved ones would have to pay the church for your pardon, or pray for your sins to be purged away. You might then make it to heaven, or go to what Hamlet calls "the other place": hell.

The Reformation shook that entrenched, embedded belief system, and people suddenly had to believe in something completely different, discarding ideas of purgatory, for example. Most critics agree that Shakespeare used the character of Hamlet to navigate this sense of belief chaos, and to explore doubts and questions about death rife in society at the time.

It's interesting that Hamlet is a student in Wittenberg (now in eastern Germany), which was the birthplace of the Reformation. The Reformation encouraged inquiry and the questioning of received wisdom, and you can argue that *Hamlet* embodies that process. But the preoccupation with death evident in Shakespeare's play was also strongly influenced by 16th-century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne's essay that begins "To study philosophy is to learn to die," which explores the importance of keeping death in the front of your mind every day. Montaigne argued that, instead of being afraid of death, you really need to interrogate it and question it.

Although it's hard to read Shakespeare's biography into his plays, we can see him grappling with death in many of them. Grief was surely a concern: we can assume he experienced the worst kind of grief when his only son, Hamnet, died at the age of 11 in 1596. So while I don't advise seeking the author in his plays, it's hard to deny that death was a major preoccupation for him.

Farah Karim-Cooper is Globe professor of Shakespeare studies at King's College London and director of education at Shakespeare's Globe

Julius Caesar and the drama of politics

by **Islam Issa**

Shakespeare's dramatisation of the conspiracy surrounding the grisly assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC reflects many of the big questions that gripped the playwright's age. Indeed, the incident – widely regarded in the west as the most famous non-Biblical historical event – was already popular with Elizabethan writers. At least four other plays about Caesar had been produced in the two decades prior to Shakespeare's, which was written c1599.

Those who lived through the religious and political upheaval triggered by the Protestant Reformation saw parallels with the chaos of the late Roman republic. For Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the notion of life without a monarch would have been inconceivable. His portrayal of Caesar as a would-be king whose untimely death and lack of nominated successor plunged the Roman world into chaos would have resonated with spectators mindful of the unresolved matter of Elizabeth I's successor.

Shakespeare's use of anachronism in the play serves to reinforce the symmetry between ancient events and contemporary questions about the nature of power. For example, in Act 2, Scene 1, a clock chimes – perhaps to nudge his early modern audience to consider how concerns of their own time echoed those of ancient Rome.

Shakespeare was an armchair traveller. Having never left England, he was dependent on Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation of Roman historian Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, evident in his characterisation of Brutus, the best known of Caesar's assassins. Plutarch clearly held Brutus in high esteem, and it is this representation of a "gentle", "noble-minded", generally upstanding individual who appears in *Julius Caesar* – a conscientious figure caught between two irreconcilable positions.

Shakespeare seems to have been interested in this ambiguity, leaving the great questions of his age unanswered on stage. His England was one of polarisation and cloak-and-dagger espionage: though many people loved their queen, others were bent on overthrowing her. This treasonous current culminated in 1605 with the gunpowder plot to assassinate James VI & I, through which Shakespeare lived. *Julius Caesar* is, therefore, a product of its time, tacitly if not explicitly reflecting the tense political landscape of its debut.

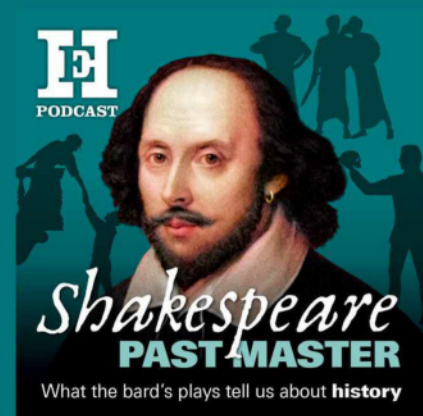
Islam Issa is professor of literature and history at Birmingham City University



Julius Caesar and his wife, Calpurnia, in an illustration from an 1877 book about Shakespeare's dramas. Though set in ancient Rome, the play has much to say about the political world of his own time

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MAIN: Characters from *The Tempest* inhabit an enchanted island in a 19th-century depiction

BELOW: A 19th-century imagining of the "foul witch" Sycorax, who remains unseen in the play despite her power



The Tempest and reactionary views of the role of women

by **Chris Laoutaris**

The Tempest took the lead slot in the First Folio – possibly guided by political factors. The publication of the Folio coincided with a misogynistic injunction issued by James VI & I instructing London's clergy to rebuke women for impropriety. Playwrights and poets followed suit, pandering to the monarch's prejudices by using their work to moralise. Certainly, *The Tempest's* depiction of an obedient daughter who submits to her father's total control over her marital and procreative destiny, while modestly upholding her own chastity, would have appealed to the king's chauvinism.

A strong theme is the presentation of women as conduits for male dynastic power. Prospero and his daughter, Miranda, are marooned on an island following the usurpation of the former's dukedom by his brother. Miranda soon becomes the focus of her father's plans to restore his bloodline to its rightful place in the world.

Conceived at a time when various European kingdoms were beginning to

colonise the New World, the play also evokes imagery of virgin land and bountiful natural resources ripe for exploitation, drawing parallels between Miranda's pure body and the enticing island she and her father inhabit.

Monstrous femininity

The Tempest was produced at a time when marriage could sometimes be little more than a transaction between a woman's father and husband, with the bride's hand in marriage accompanied by the promise of money, land or property. Married women were referred to by the legal term *covert-baron*: literally, 'covered by a husband'. On being married, a woman's legal identity was subsumed into her husband's.

Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have been familiar with poet Geoffrey Whitney's 1586 book *A Choice of Emblemes*, which taught moral messages via imagery. Its depiction of a "virtuous wife" has her standing on a tortoise, covering her lips with one hand and holding a bunch of keys with

the other. In essence, it denotes the permanence of home (the tortoise's shell) and the woman's need to consign herself to the domestic sphere in silent obedience.

The Tempest also alludes to another, unseen female presence, Sycorax – mother of the monstrous Caliban. Referred to by Prospero as a "foul witch", Sycorax is juxtaposed with Miranda's idealised womanhood, symbolising a dangerous, even demonic self-sufficient femininity. Prospero describes her son as the product of an unholy sexual union with the devil, presenting Caliban as a grotesque figure who is a living testament to his mother's warped sense of womanhood. **H**

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Labour's leap to power

A century ago, Ramsay MacDonald entered 10 Downing Street as Britain's first Labour prime minister. His rapid rise stunned his rivals. Yet it wasn't long, writes **Richard Toye**, before they were preparing their revenge

Accompanies
the new BBC Radio 4
documentary **Ramsay
MacDonald: Labour's
First Prime Minister**



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:
Workers from the North East
protest during the 1920s;
unemployed marchers at a rally
in Trafalgar Square, 1922;
a cartoon depicts Ramsay
MacDonald leapfrogging
HH Asquith and David Lloyd
George after becoming leader
of the opposition in 1922



GETTY IMAGES/DREAMSTIME/TOPFOTO

Late in the morning of 22 January 1924, Conservative prime minister Stanley Baldwin stepped out of the rear of Downing Street, hailed a passing taxi and headed to Buckingham

Palace for an audience with King George V. Baldwin was making the short journey to hand in his resignation – one taken by so many leaders before and since. But there was one key difference to his experience from those of earlier Tory PMs: this time he was to be succeeded not by a leader of the Conservatives' long-time opponents, the Liberals, but by Ramsay MacDonald – who would shortly be confirmed as the first Labour Party prime minister in British history.

These events marked a striking reversal of fortune for MacDonald: less than a decade earlier, his staunch opposition to the First World War had made him one of the most hated men in Britain. He now made the leap to premier without ever previously held high office.

This was also a moment of truth for the Labour Party itself, less than a quarter of a century old and forming a government for the first time. For many Britons, the all-too-recent horrors of the Bolshevik revolution were proof that socialists, even ostensibly moderate ones, could not be trusted with power. The king, a cousin of the slain Russian royal family, was also apprehensive. During

his first audience with MacDonald, he expressed his hope that the prime minister "would do nothing to compel him to shake hands with the murderers of his relatives".

It was probably inevitable that the Labour Party, representing the organised working class, would one day form a government – but not that this would happen as early as 1924. Had Labour's Conservative and Liberal opponents played their respective hands differently, the moment of truth could have been significantly postponed.

Poverty and plenty

Understanding the origins of that moment requires a step back to the late 19th century, a time of accelerated technological developments and growing wealth but also of radical inequality. The common phrase 'poverty in the midst of plenty' encapsulated the moral case for change. New socialist groups proliferated and trade unions boomed, winning significant victories for unskilled workers.

MacDonald was born in Scotland in 1866, the illegitimate son of a farm labourer and a maidservant. He took an early interest in socialism, but continued to put his faith in cooperation between the Liberal Party and

The first Labour government

the forces of labour. Eventually, he concluded that the Liberals had little interest in fielding working-class candidates for public office. In common with many of his generation who urgently sought social progress, he reached the conclusion that an independent party was needed. And in 1900, when the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) – a forerunner of the Labour Party – was formed, MacDonald became its secretary.

Three years later, MacDonald struck a deal with the Liberal chief whip, Herbert Gladstone, such that 35 LRC parliamentary candidates ran unopposed by Liberals – an arrangement that proved key to a breakthrough at the 1906 general election, when the LRC won 29 seats and was subsequently renamed the Labour Party. Yet by the time the First World War broke out in 1914, Labour had made limited further progress. Pacifist MacDonald resigned as chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) in opposition to the war, in the process becoming a target for popular hatred. However, his party rival, Arthur Henderson, accepted positions in the Liberal-led wartime coalitions of HH Asquith (May 1915–December 1916) and David Lloyd George (December 1916–December 1918), giving Labour its first taste of life in government.

The party also stood to benefit from the passing of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which extended the franchise to millions of new voters, including all men over the age of 21 and women over the age of 30 who met certain property qualifications.

A political comeback

By 1922, MacDonald had bounced back. At that year's general election, Labour – now led by JR Clynes – won 142 seats, becoming the official opposition for the first time. When

MacDonald was confident, but even he must have been surprised by the speed at which events then moved

parliament met following the election, MacDonald was once again chosen as PLP chairman, albeit by just a few votes – otherwise the first Labour prime minister could have been the now-forgotten figure of Clynes, who lacked the force, charisma and eloquence that made MacDonald a far more convincing candidate for Number 10.

Labour's appeal was boosted by the seeming failures of capitalism, manifested in mass unemployment. Outraged at the Conservative government's inaction, members of the 'Red Clydeside' group of radical MPs stirred up rowdy Commons scenes in protest, presenting themselves as the champions of the poor. To some observers, though, they appeared sour, militant class warriors. The arch-Conservative *Morning Post* decried their speeches as "examples of Bolshevik frightfulness well calculated for the end in view of disgusting the 'workers' (and everybody else) with parliament".

MacDonald worried about the consequences of such antics, appealing to his MPs "for a greater measure of self-restraint and for a realisation of the fact that when a Labour government arrives it will be greatly hampered if, in the meantime, parliamentary



government has been destroyed".

Clearly, MacDonald believed that the first Labour government was a matter of when, not if – a confidence reflecting his evolutionary vision of socialism. Yet even he must have been surprised by the speed at which events then moved.

In 1923, Baldwin – having been prime minister for only a matter of months – called a snap general election. He had concluded that the high levels of unemployment afflicting Britain could not be solved without the introduction of protectionist tariffs – but this plan, he believed, required the endorsement of the voters before it could be put into action. His startling move had the dual effects of reuniting the Liberals under Asquith's leadership and giving a fillip to Labour, which broadly

TIMELINE Labour's turbulent early decades

1900

The Labour Representation Committee is founded, bringing together representatives of trade unions, the Independent Labour Party, the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation – with the aim of promoting workers' interests.

1906

Twenty-nine **Labour MPs are elected to the House of Commons**, marking a major turning point for the party.

1918

The Labour Party adopts a new constitution. This includes **the famous Clause 4**, committing it to the socialist principle of "the common ownership of the means of production".

22 January 1924

Following the 1923 general election and the defeat of the incumbent Conservative government, **Ramsay MacDonald becomes Britain's first Labour prime minister**.

11 September 1924

MacDonald is accused of giving a friend, Alexander Grant, a **baronetcy in return for a car and substantial financial help**. MacDonald argues that Grant had been honoured for philanthropic activities – but the story proves embarrassing.



Members of the Labour Representation Committee in 1906, including (third left) Ramsay MacDonald



A Labour campaign poster from 1924 – the year the party formed its first government



Day of destiny Women at a London polling station during the 1923 general election. The vote produced “one of the great upsets of British political history”: a Labour government

shared the Liberals’ free trade values. Polling took place on 6 December, resulting in one of the great upsets of British political history.

The Conservatives secured 5.5 million votes (38.1 per cent of those cast), Labour 4.4 million (30.5 per cent), and the Liberals 4.3 million (29.6 per cent). This translated into 258 seats for the Conservatives, 191 for Labour, and 159 for the Liberals. Though the Tories lost their majority, they remained the largest party, and Baldwin did not resign immediately. Instead, ministers drew up a King’s Speech – a programme of legislation to put before MPs – thus putting the onus on the Liberals, now effectively kingmakers, to either keep the Conservatives in office or let Labour take over. It was an invidious choice but, despite the unease of some of his supporters,



Past and present

Ramsay MacDonald (centre) in 1924 with former Labour Party leader Arthur Henderson (right), who had served in two coalition governments during the First World War

October 1924

Following the Campbell affair (see p37), MacDonald is accused of **going soft on communism**. The Liberals and Conservatives are now united against Labour.



Anti-MacDonald propaganda claimed that he put Britain at risk of a Bolshevik takeover

8 October 1924

The cabinet agrees that MacDonald should ask the king, George V, for a dissolution of parliament – in other words, call an election.

9 October 1924

The king grants MacDonald a dissolution, though asks to place his reluctance on record. According to MacDonald, George “remarked that no other party could form a government that could last”.



George V granted MacDonald a dissolution of parliament after Labour lost a confidence vote

29 October 1924

Britons go to the polls in the third general election in the space of just two years. **The Conservative Party wins a landslide victory**, paving the way for Stanley Baldwin to become prime minister for a second time.

5 June 1929

The 1929 general election results in a hung parliament. MacDonald is invited to form a Labour minority government and **serves as prime minister until 1935** – although the last four years of his premiership are as the head of a coalition known as the National Government, dominated by the Conservatives.

The first Labour government

Liberal leader Asquith decided to give MacDonald his chance.

When parliament met in the new year, the government's defeat set the stage for Baldwin's cab-ride to the palace as newspaper placards declared "Lenin Dead (official), Ramsay MacDonald Premier".

According to Jack Lawson, a former miner who now became a junior minister, "The coming of that first Labour government was a terrific shock to the divinely ordained to rule element in the country." There was certainly something of a change in style, as demonstrated by a story told about the new colonial secretary, JH Thomas. His private secretary, inherited from the previous Conservative minister, was asked how he liked his new boss. "Very much indeed," he responded. "It's much more intimate. My old chief used to ring the bell for me. My new chief puts his head round the door of my room, and says: 'Come 'ere, you b -----!'"

However, the new administration failed to challenge the established political and economic system. With a shortage of experienced personnel, it was necessary to make some appointments from beyond the ranks of the Labour Party; for example, the Liberal grandee Lord Haldane became lord chancellor. MacDonald acted as his own foreign secretary, working tirelessly towards Franco-German reconciliation. He sent Arthur Henderson to the Home Office, and made the austere Philip Snowden – another rival of MacDonald – chancellor of the Exchequer. Snowden's so-called 'Housewife's Budget' cut duties on sugar and tea but did not feature the 'capital levy', a tax on fortunes that had previously featured in Labour's programme yet which was thought to be electorally unpopular. Unemployment benefits were extended and some temporary public works schemes launched but, lacking a majority – and clear policy solutions – the government failed to solve the problem of the dole queue.

Ready to strike

MacDonald himself was hardly able to enjoy his success. Though his daughter Ishbel, one of his five surviving children, served as his hostess in Downing Street, the widowed MacDonald suffered from chronic loneliness, and his low moods sometimes spilled over into bitterness towards his colleagues.

There were increased tensions between the parliamentary and trade union sides of the labour movement, too. Industrial action continued to break out, in spite of ministers' appeals to union leaders such as Ernest Bevin; to Bevin's disgust, the government threatened to use the Emergency Powers Act to force striking dockers back to work. However, Labour enjoyed a key



Industrial anger A crowd throngs Paddington station during the rail strike of January 1924. There were tensions between the first Labour government and the trade union movement

MacDonald with his daughter Ishbel. The widowed leader suffered from chronic loneliness



domestic success in the form of a Housing Act, pioneered by Clydeside MP John Wheatley, which led to a noted increase in building.

On the international front, MacDonald's administration took steps that signalled a break with the approaches taken by preceding governments. It moved quickly to bestow diplomatic recognition on the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, or Soviet Union), formed in December 1922. Two treaties were later negotiated with the Soviets to settle past disputes and create new trade relations. MacDonald scrapped plans for a naval base in Singapore (though the Conservatives later reversed this decision). Importantly, working with the French, he also helped win preliminary approval from League of Nations member states for the Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes.

After the Labour government fell later in 1924, its Conservative successor declined to ratify this proposed new mechanism, which would have made arbitration compulsory and bolstered the role of the World Court. Whether the Geneva Protocol would have worked is a moot point, but the fact that the Tories



Peace deal MacDonald (centre) arrives in Geneva for a meeting of the League of Nations in 1924. His administration would go on to secure approval for a convention on resolving international disputes

rejected it allowed Labour to develop a narrative in which European peace and disarmament could have been achieved if only the League had been strengthened as the advocates of socialist foreign policy had wished.

Yet with Labour only the second-largest party in parliament, it was inevitable that MacDonald's government could not last long. While his enemies watched for a moment to strike, the prime minister's best hope, he believed, was to show that his party was capable of governing and had no intention of indulging in Bolshevik-style experiments. Finally, though, the Conservatives and the Liberals joined forces over an issue that they believed would play out unfavourably to Labour.

JR Campbell, acting editor of the communist newspaper *Workers' Weekly*, had been charged with incitement to mutiny as the result of an article he had published urging soldiers not to fire on strikers. The attorney general, Sir Patrick Hastings, then withdrew the prosecution – a move that could be portrayed as ministers being soft on communism. MacDonald made a (probably unintentionally) misleading statement about his knowledge of the affair and, as anger swelled, the government was heavily defeated in the Commons, triggering a general election. That campaign was marked by a particularly notorious episode that Labour came to regard as a classic example of Tory 'dirty tricks'.

On 25 October, shortly before polling day, the *Daily Mail* published "A 'very secret' letter of instruction from Moscow, which... discloses a great Bolshevik plot to paralyse the British Army and Navy and to plunge the

The 1924 election was marked by what Labour came to regard as a classic example of Tory 'dirty tricks'

country into civil war." This letter, purportedly written to British communists by Grigory Zinoviev of the Communist International (Comintern) movement, was almost certainly forged, probably by someone with connections to Britain's secret security organisations. Even if the scheme had been real, it would have stood little chance of success – but it played on the genuine fears of many voters, and the Tories made the most of it.

Bruised but defiant

In the event, the election brought a Conservative landslide, ousting MacDonald after just nine and a half months in the top post. Bruised but defiant, he survived to fight another day, serving as the head of another minority government from 1929. Two years later he joined with Tories and Liberals to form the so-called National Government,

continuing as prime minister for another four years till 1935, but he was never forgiven by those within the Labour Party who believed he had betrayed them.

Labour, it could be argued, nevertheless owed MacDonald a great deal because of his earlier actions. The result of the autumn 1924 election was far less bad than it first appeared. True, the Conservatives won a highly impressive 419 constituencies and a 48.3 per cent share of the vote – but, though Labour's representation in the Commons was reduced to just 151 seats, its share of the vote climbed to 33 per cent. The real losers in that election were the Liberals: they took just 40 seats, with their portion of votes cut to 17.6 per cent.

If MacDonald's plan had been to ensure that Labour would henceforth provide the only electorally credible alternative to the Conservatives, he had succeeded spectacularly. On the face of it, such a short-lived government might seem an abject failure. Taking the long view, though, MacDonald's determination to showcase Labour's capacity for steady, competent government proved a remarkable strategic success – one that seeded a century of political strength. **H**

Richard Toye is professor of history at the University of Exeter. His latest book is *Age of Hope: Labour, 1945, and the Birth of Modern Britain* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2023)



Richard Toye appears on the BBC Radio 4 programme **Ramsay MacDonald: Labour's First Prime Minister**, which airs on 15 January





How **Asterix** conquered the world

Eran Almagor reveals how the indomitable Gaul became a comic strip sensation – and transformed perceptions of ancient history in the process



Turning the tables

The enormous popularity of Asterix (shown left, and below with his sidekick, Obelix) has cast the classical world in a new light. The c48 BC coin (above right) may depict the real-life Gaulish leader Vercingetorix, who is shown surrendering Gaul to Julius Caesar in the *Asterix* series

Asterix is a global superstar. Since it first appeared in 1959, this juggernaut of a comic strip has been translated into more than 100 languages and dialects, spawned films and games – not to mention a theme park – and made its co-creators, René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo, France's bestselling authors overseas.

For decades, this tale of a diminutive Gaulish warrior – with the help of his best friend, Obelix, and the magic potion prepared by the village druid – has won over readers courtesy of its heroes' refusal to bend to a vastly superior foe: the Romans. As a staggering tally of almost 400 million global sales shows, the comic strip has proven an equally formidable foe to its rivals on the newsstands.

Yet there's more to Asterix than sales figures. So universal has been this comic strip's impact, so embedded is it in a whole host of nations' cultures, that it has changed the way we look at ancient history, too.

Asterix is, of course, indisputably, distinctively French. The story is told from the point of view of the Gauls, the ancient people of what is today France. The ancient Greeks and Romans were fascinated by these barbarians of the west. Greeks called them Celts (*Keltoi*) and Romans named them Gauls (*Galli*). Yet their descriptions were rarely flattering: to the Greeks and Romans, the Gauls were an

uncivilised rabble who could and should be vanquished.

In the classical division of the world's nations, the Gauls, as a western or northern people, were courageous but lacked competence or wisdom. They were the typical 'others' and were hardly given a voice to express their own beliefs and opinions. When the Gauls did speak in the ancient texts, it was the Greek and Roman writers who gave them these words.

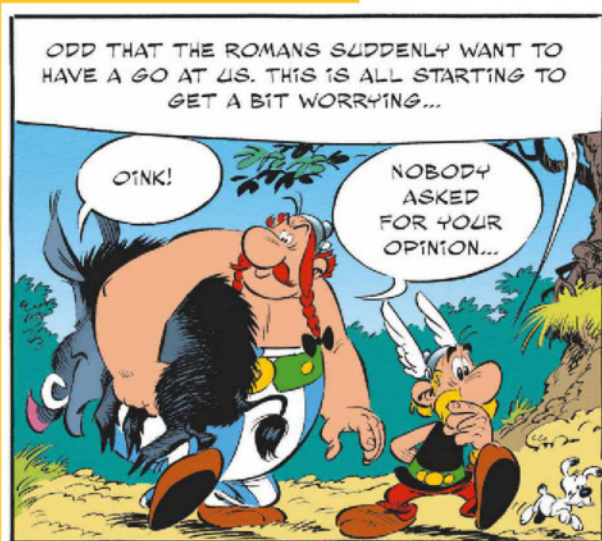
Asterix changed all that. In Goscinny and Uderzo's imagining, the Gauls are no longer the passive objects on which civilised authors write, mostly in

contempt and derision. They are the heroes, with their own voices and their own appearances. And they are not afraid to express their opinions.

In fact, *Asterix* finds the Gauls turning the tables on their so-called superiors altogether. While Greek authors once patronised these western barbarians, in *Asterix at the Olympic Games* (1972), the village chief Vitalstatistix asks his men not to mock the Greeks who unfortunately "do not have our glorious past and cultural heritage".

The Romans also find themselves on the receiving end of Gaulish jokes. In his real-life account of the Gallic Wars (*De Bello Gallico*), Julius Caesar described the ethnic group of Belgians as the bravest part of Gaul. However, two millennia later, *Asterix* challenges this portrayal. In *Asterix in Belgium* (1980), the Gauls, together with the Belgians, fight the Roman soldiers, and invite Caesar to judge afresh which nation is in fact braver.

The story is now told from the Gauls' perspective, and it's the Romans' turn to be seen as the outsiders. The Latin language itself becomes esoteric and even ridiculed. It is spoken only occasionally – as irrelevant school-boy citations uttered by an old pirate. It is not the Gauls who are judged by the Romans to transgress the norm, but the



The story is told from the Gauls' perspective, and it's the Romans' turn to be seen as the outsiders

How Asterix rewrote history

other way around. “These Romans are crazy” (*“Ils sont fous ces Romains”*) is a constant refrain throughout the series, usually voiced by Obelix.

By overturning the pecking order of civilisations, *Asterix* has changed attitudes to ancient history in another way, and that’s by making some of the claims made by Roman and Greek historians look faintly ridiculous. If you return to the classical texts after reading the comic strip, the descriptions of the Gauls now appear so graphic as to be blatantly exaggerated and biased.

Diodorus of Sicily, a historian who lived in the last decades of the Roman republic, wrote that the Gauls constantly fight, on any trivial matter, even during the course of a meal. Ammianus Marcellinus, a Roman historian who lived 400 years later, observed that a Gaul might even call on his wife to help him fight. These caricatures are pushed to the point of absurdity in *Asterix*, and when they are, their sheer grotesqueness is laid bare in a way that would scarcely have been possible before the comic strip appeared.

In the first-century AD, the Greek geographer Strabo described a meeting between Alexander the Great and a group of Gauls near the Danube river. Alexander asks the Gauls if they fear anything – expecting them to utter his name. But they declare that they only fear one thing: that the sky would fall on them – just as the Gauls repeatedly do in *Asterix*. It is now almost impossible to read Strabo and not be reminded of how *Asterix* riffed upon the ancient texts.

Goscinnny and Uderzo’s

comic strip does more than reframe the relationship between the Gauls and the Romans; it also provides a new perspective on the very nature of Roman imperialism. And it does so by presenting a mirror-image of it.

Human sacrifice is ascribed to the Normans, Goths, Egyptians – and even the Romans themselves



Tough nut to crack Asterix’s village stands firms against four Roman forts. In Goscinnny and Uderzo’s comic strip, this corner of Gaul is the centre of the world

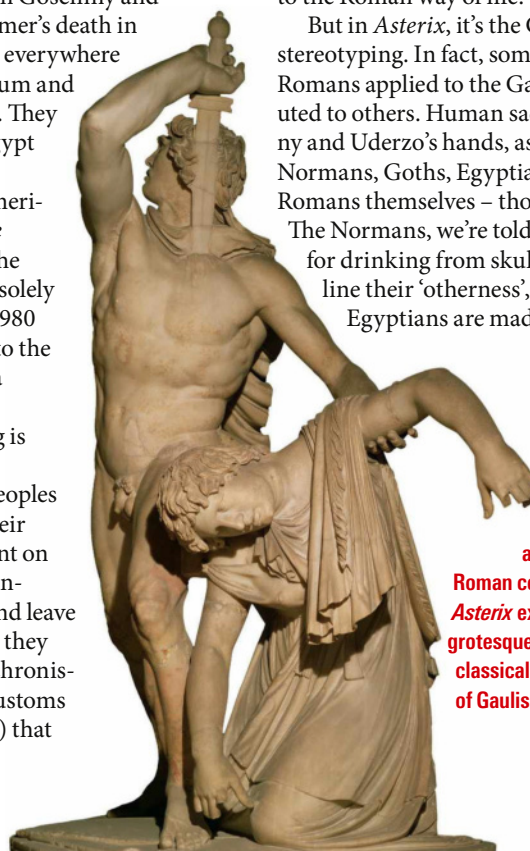
The village of the Gauls, located in Armorica (now Brittany) at the edge of the world known to Greeks and Romans, has now become the world’s centre. It is from here that the heroes embark on their many journeys. In the 24 albums that were the fruit of the joint collaboration between Goscinnny and Uderzo (until the former’s death in 1977), the Gauls visit everywhere from Britain to Belgium and Spain to Switzerland. They meet Cleopatra in Egypt and even cross the Atlantic to North America. In *Asterix and the Black Gold* – one of the 10 albums produced solely by Uderzo between 1980 and 2009 – they sail to the Middle East aboard a Phoenician ship.

What’s interesting is how Asterix and his comrades treat the peoples they encounter on their travels. They comment on their peculiarities (language or practices) and leave their mark whenever they go, especially in anachronistically introducing customs (such as bull fighting) that

would later be distinguishing characteristics of these nations.

Such assessments were very much part of the Roman imperial mindset. Stereotyping conquered people gave its leaders the ideological justification to subject vanquished tribes to the Roman way of life.

But in *Asterix*, it’s the Gauls doing the stereotyping. In fact, some traits that the Romans applied to the Gauls are now attributed to others. Human sacrifice is, in Goscinnny and Uderzo’s hands, ascribed to the Normans, Goths, Egyptians and even the Romans themselves – though only as a threat. The Normans, we’re told, have a penchant for drinking from skulls. And, to underline their ‘otherness’, the Goths and Egyptians are made to speak in



A Gaul kills his wife and then himself in a Roman copy of a Greek statue. *Asterix* exposes the “sheer grotesqueness” of classical portrayals of Gaulish culture

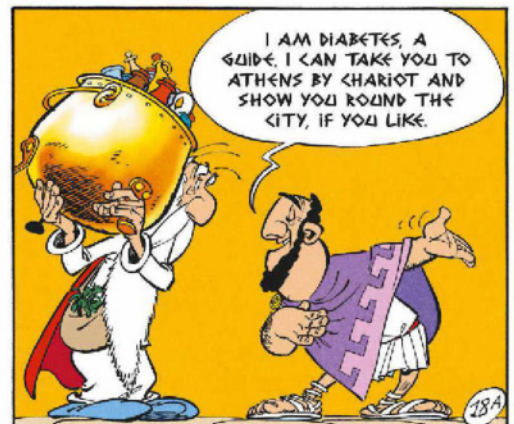
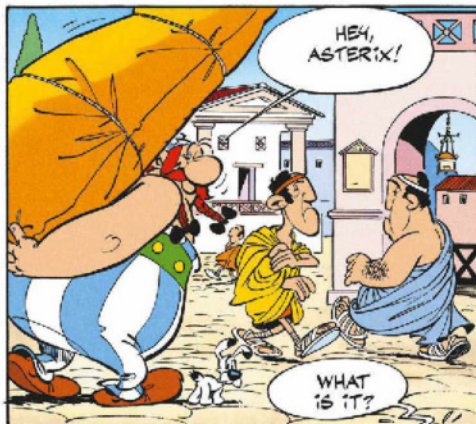
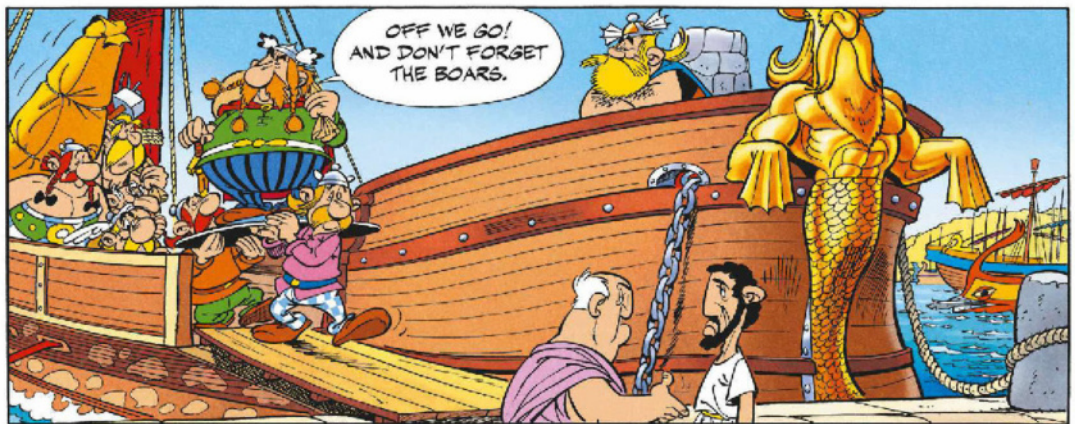
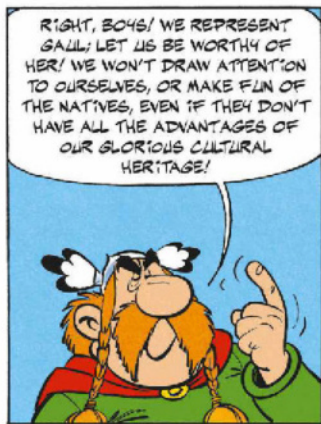


Punctured vanity

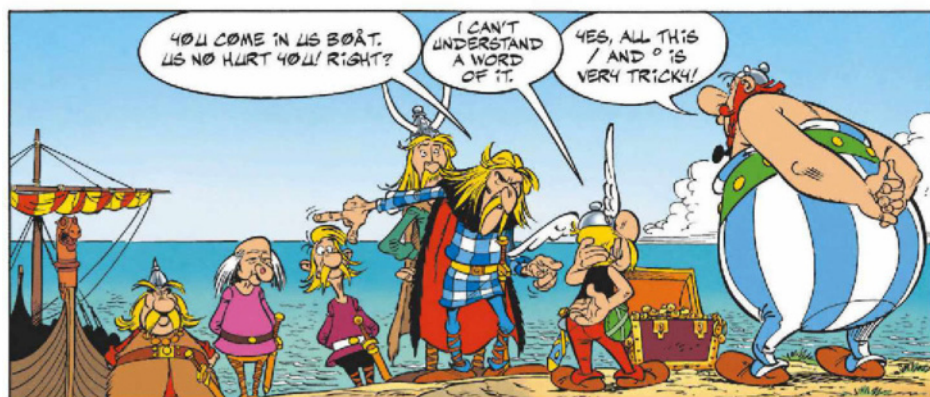
A first-century BC bust of the Gauls' nemesis, Julius Caesar. In *Asterix in Belgium*, Goscinny and Uderzo signal their heroes' opposition to empire-building by depicting Caesar as Napoleon facing his Waterloo



Comic geniuses René Goscinny (left) and Albert Uderzo, the men who created *Asterix*, pictured in the 1970s. Their comic strip has registered almost 400 million sales since it first appeared in 1959



The joke's on you *Asterix* sees the Gauls reversing ancient stereotypes. In *Asterix at the Olympic Games* (above), the village chief Vitalstatistix warns his compatriots that the Greeks "don't have all the advantages of our glorious cultural heritage"



Lost in translation Asterix and Obelix struggle to understand a group of Danes (top), whose English words are topped by diacritics to make them look Scandinavian – a fact noted by Obelix himself. ABOVE: A scene from *Asterix and the Goths*, which underscores the ‘otherness’ of this Germanic people by rendering their speech bubbles in Gothic script



The past recast A Gaul is depicted in a sculpted block discovered in Paris. *Asterix* has helped reframe the residents of ancient France in a new light

non-Roman script in their speech bubbles (Gothic script or Hieroglyphics).

There is also a modern dimension to such stereotyping. Attitudes towards contemporary Germans are transferred to their forefathers the Goths; in *Asterix in Switzerland*, the Gauls encounter bank safes and hour glasses. It's also worth noting that, in the description of the various tribes that Asterix encounters, there is a faint echo of former French interventions across the globe in many of the territories that Asterix visits.

Asterix and his colleagues are against all forms of imperialism, both Roman and French

However, there's a critical distinction to be drawn here. Asterix is not an empire-builder. He and his colleagues do not use their power to expand geographically when they fight Roman aggression. They are against all forms of imperialism, both Roman and French. It is Julius Caesar whom Goscinny and Uderzo portray as Napoleon Bonaparte, facing his Waterloo in Belgium when confronting the Gauls.

The British, as we all know, constructed one of the largest empires the world has ever seen. Despite this, the authors clearly had a soft spot for their northern neighbour. This can be seen in the special message the authors wrote as a foreword to the English translation of *Asterix in Britain* (1970). Signed by “Asterix, Uderzo and Goscinny”, it is a message that has no parallel in any other translation of the series. It begins: “As usual, we caricature what we are fond of, and we are fond of the British in spite of their strange way of putting Nelson on top of their columns instead of Napoleon.” The authors go on to hail Britons’ bravery and love of warm beer, before expressing their hope that “the Gauls would have as good a sense of humour as the British”.

Warm words indeed. But what explains Uderzo and Goscinny's affection for the British? They can certainly be ‘others’ in the eyes of the Gauls – and the descriptions of them in *Asterix* are hardly lacking in stereotypes – but there's common ground there, too. The reference to Nelson is a reminder that imperial France never succeeded in vanquishing the British, just as the Romans never succeeded in vanquishing these Gauls. And just as Asterix's home village is a hotbed of resistance to the Romans so, in *Asterix in Britain*, is a small village in Cantium (Kent).

But if there's one way in which Uderzo and Goscinny's comic strip doesn't cede any ground to the British, it is in its very Frenchness. *Asterix* may have won over readers across the globe, it may have been translated into myriad languages, it may have poked fun at numerous cultures, but it has never forgotten where it came from. *Asterix's* enormous success has helped defend modern French (paralleled by the Gauls) against the linguistic and cultural encroachment of (American) English (paralleled by the Romans). It is one part of French national heritage that cannot be appropriated by others. In this respect, Asterix the Gaul is indeed indomitable. **E**

Eran Almagor is a historian and author. His books include *Plutarch and the Persica* (Edinburgh, 2018)

Gaul Britannia!

Eran Almagor salutes the English version of *Asterix* which, after a troubled start, grew into a witty, pun-filled triumph

"It was the year 43 AD..."

All England came under Roman rule – except for one small village... Try as they might, the Romans could not force these British hardnuts to surrender."

Hard to believe as it may be, Asterix was initially presented to the English-speaking readership as a Briton, fighting against the Roman invaders of the island.

Sixty years ago, in November 1963, Asterix appeared for the first time in the UK in the weekly comics periodical *Valiant*, as 'Little Fred', together with his friend 'Big Ed', the name chosen for Obelix. The album *Asterix le Gaulois* was Britonised into *Little Fred, the Ancient Brit with Bags of Grit*.

Little Fred hardly took Britain by storm. In fact, it was terminated after just a few months. But that didn't stop Asterix being introduced again as a Briton – this time in September 1965, in the British magazine for boys *Ranger*. Asterix was now 'Beric the Bold', Obelix became 'Son of Boadicea', and the album *Le Combat des Chef (The Big Fight)* was adapted into a strip called *Britons Never, Never, Never Shall Be Slaves!* Despite this tub-thumping title, Beric the Bold also failed to capture the imagination of its British audience.

Disaster now appeared to beckon for the comic strip's British adventure. Yet *Asterix's* fortunes began to change in 1969 when the task of producing English translations was handed over to Anthea Bell and Derek Hockridge. Their take on Uderzo and Goscinny's creation was witty and irreverent. Above all, it rendered its lead characters as they were always meant to be: Gauls. British readers were soon smitten.

One of the reasons that Bell and Hockridge's translation was such a success was that it kept the humorous spirit of the original, while innovating with great freedom. This is perhaps most obvious in the naming of its characters. All Gauls' names end in -ix, yet in the English version, some of these have been changed for comic effect: the dog Idéfix becomes Dogmatix, while Panoramix, the druid who administers a potion as a drug, is now Getafix. Roman characters, all ending in -us, also get new monikers – none more memorable than

Asterix takes a swipe at Roman legionaries in the first book in the comic series. The famous Gaul initially struggled to win over British readers

Sendervictorius and Appianglorius from *Asterix the Gladiator*.

Bell and Hockridge also inserted puns where the original had none. In *Asterix in Corsica*, the character Boneywasawarriorwayayix asks if a Corsican can come on board the pirates' ship, and receives the answer "course he can".

In the French *Chez les Bretons*, the British characters speak in French, yet use English grammatical practices (such as forwarding the adjective before the noun) that distinguish them from the Gauls. Bell and Hockridge could not repeat this, and so had to turn to another technique to differentiate between Britons and non-Britons. All the figures speak English, but their translation gives the Britons the style of 'upper-class twits' using expressions such as 'jolly good,

eh, what?'. Consequently, new puns find their way into the text. When a vendor asks angrily whether the melon he is selling is bad, a customer replies "rather old fruit".

Bell and Hockridge had landed upon a winning formula. Over the following four decades, the pair would go on to produce 33 English translations – securing the comic strip's position in the affections of a nation. Asterix's campaign to conquer Britain almost ended in ignominy. Yet, after a number of false starts, he triumphed once more.



Scenes from *Asterix and the White Iris*. This, the Gaul's 40th adventure, was published in October 2023, 60 years after he first appeared in the UK

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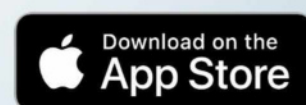
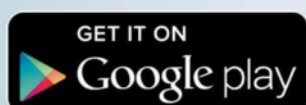
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THE NEW RADICALS

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Members of the Bloomsbury Group (including Vanessa Bell, third left) behind a fake plane; enjoying a drink at Charleston, home to Duncan Grant (second right) and Vanessa Bell; the studio at Charleston; Duncan Grant's c1945 painting of *Paul Roche Reclining*; 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury, where the group first began to take shape



PART OF THE VANESSA BELL COLLECTION - TATE ARCHIVE; © TATE

The Bloomsbury Group transformed British culture in the early 20th century – and its impact is still felt across the world today. The secret to its success, writes **Frances Spalding**, lay in the strong bonds between its members

A veritable industry has grown up around Bloomsbury, the group of writers, artists and intellectuals that was, in poet Stephen Spender's opinion, "the most constructive and creative influence on English taste between the two wars". Its history and idiosyncrasies have become the subject of countless articles, books, exhibitions, documentaries, plays, TV series, films and ballets. Its reputation has travelled far, to many places around the world.

The chief reason that the Bloomsbury Group remains such a source of fascination more than 100 years after it first emerged is the brilliance of its members. Among its leading lights was Roger Fry – whose championing of Post-Impressionist art in the years leading up to the First World War caused uproar in London – and Lytton Strachey, whose *Eminent Victorians* brought an irreverent humour to the art of writing biographies. The group also included John Maynard Keynes who, after witnessing the Treaty of Versailles, wrote *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, in which he argued that the harsh war reparations would lead to the financial collapse of Germany. And, of course, there was Virginia Woolf – author of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929) – who, having declared her intention to "reform the novel", went about doing exactly that.

With London as their base, the Bloomsbury Group established an intricate network of social, sexual and hereditary relationships that led the writer Dorothy Parker to remark that they "lived in squares... and loved in triangles". From those squares, they shaped cultural tastes for decades to come.

Defying description

For a creative force whose influence was so wide-ranging, the Bloomsbury Group is difficult to pin down. Even their title seems to be the outcome of mere happenstance, for they first began holding regular meetings together in the early 1900s in an area of London, south of the three great rail terminals – Euston, St Pancras and King's Cross – called 'Bloomsbury'. This name took hold when Molly MacCarthy, the wife of Desmond MacCarthy, a central figure, began referring to its members as the 'Bloomsberries'.

Those involved were active across several fields – art, art criticism, economics, journalism, literature, publishing, political and social theory. Their manner of living was based on the habit of regular and persistent work. But, as a group, they had no party line, no membership rules and no manifesto. They

The Bloomsbury Group

were a tolerant lot, accepting sexual or political differences within the group, and only once coming close to an almighty row: during the First World War, the pacifists among them ganged up against John Maynard Keynes, then working for the government in the Treasury, and accused him of using his knowledge to help finance the war.

The shared interests and reformist ideals that characterised Bloomsbury were discovered through their love of conversation.

Many of them – Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Leonard Woolf and Desmond MacCarthy – had become friends with Thoby Stephen (the brother of Bell's future wife, painter Vanessa Bell) through their association with Cambridge. And all came from a highly educated part of the upper-middle class, except Woolf.

Born into a Jewish family that had only recently risen into the professional middle class, he was made acutely aware of the privileges they enjoyed: "Socially they assumed things unconsciously which I could never assume either unconsciously or consciously. They lived in a peculiar atmosphere of influence, manners, respectability." This was the background against which Bloomsbury drew its strength and against which it was to rebel.

Rejecting repression

Looking back at Bloomsbury from the vantage point of the 21st century, it is astonishing to realise that these men and women were in fact Victorians, born into a highly repressive culture. One of the most determining influences on Vanessa Bell and her need to escape the conventions constricting her early adulthood must have been her family home in Kensington's Hyde Park Gate.

In 1904, the young painter surprised her relatives by removing herself and her three siblings from Kensington to Bloomsbury in the wake of their father's death. Leslie Stephen had latterly been knighted for his eminence as a man of letters and for editing 26 volumes of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. But he had also become self-pitying, tearful and tyrannical, and the home, with its Victorian furniture and heavy, velvet curtains, seemed dark and unhappy. Most days of the week, Vanessa and her sister Virginia were obliged to hold tea parties for his visitors. Tea-table conversation had to be polite: a great many words were used, but little of interest was said.

All this changed with the move to Bloomsbury, to 46 Gordon Square, a classical, Regency terraced house. Vanessa decided to



Creative force Vanessa Bell with Thoby Stephen. The siblings were central players in the emergence of the Bloomsbury Group

start holding 'At Homes', informal after-dinner gatherings at which the choice of drink was simply hot chocolate.

Cards were sent out to their aunts and Kensington friends and to Thoby's companions at Cambridge, where he was studying. This produced an awkward mix. On one occasion a name game was played in which the names of people and places were called out after a particular letter of the alphabet had been chosen. When 'G' was announced, one Cambridge wit shot out the words 'Jerusalem' and 'Jesus', teasingly playing with the similarity in sound between 'G' and 'J'. This shocked family relatives who had never before heard these sacred names treated with such flippancy. Before long, they and others of the older generation decided to stay away from these gatherings, thereby enabling Thoby's friends to become more prominent.

It is worth noticing that when Thoby Stephen invited his Cambridge friends to attend 'At Homes' and introduced them to his sisters, who had not received a university education, he in effect brought Cambridge's love of debate and philosophical discussion into Bloomsbury. Here Bloomsbury began.

The pacifists among the group accused John Maynard Keynes of helping to finance the war



Sharp thinkers

Vanessa Bell cuts Lytton Strachey's hair while Roger Fry, Clive Bell, Duncan Grant and Saxon Sydney-Turner look on, c1916

The visual expression of this showed in Vanessa's management of the house. She had some of the rooms painted white. She draped Indian shawls over chairs and tables, delighting in their richness when seen against the white walls. She also hung in the hallway two rows of high-art photographs taken by her great-aunt Julia Margaret Cameron. And she struck out against middle-class conventions. Vanessa's sister, Virginia Woolf, later recalled: "We were full of experiments and reforms. We were going to do without table napkins... we were going to paint; to write; to have coffee after dinner instead of tea at nine o'clock..."

How should you live? What was the nature of good? What philosophy could be found to support and justify the good life? These were the kind of questions that arose at this time and they awakened a fresh desire for intellectual honesty. In the history books, Bloomsbury takes its place within the wider development of liberal thought. For it was not only in England that certain moral conventions and social customs came to seem stale and outmoded. What distinguishes Bloomsbury from its Victorian predecessors was the



Object of desire At least three members of the Bloomsbury Group fell in love with Duncan Grant, shown dressed as a Spanish dancer at Charleston



emphasis it placed on private life. Whereas the Victorians had paid a great deal of attention to public virtue, this younger generation was to focus instead on personal relations, on the grounds that unless honesty can be found close at hand, it is unlikely to be found in the larger, more public sphere.

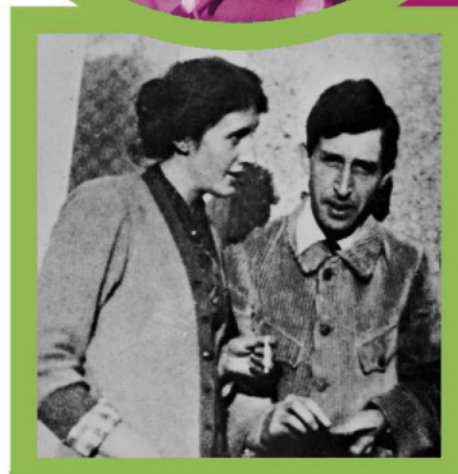
Tightest of circles

The untimely death of Thoby Stephen, in 1906, resulting from typhoid fever contracted while on holiday in Asia Minor, drew this circle closer together. The loss of Thoby seems to have affected Vanessa's decision to accept a proposal of marriage from Clive Bell, which she had previously turned down. Less than six years later her sister was to marry another of their late brother's friends, Leonard Woolf. In addition, the group was made additionally close-knit by several temporary homosexual alliances: Lytton Strachey, Adrian Stephen (Thoby's younger brother) and Maynard Keynes were all at one point in love with Duncan Grant, the painter and cousin of Lytton Strachey. (The facetious remark that Bloomsbury was a group of friends who all

happened to be in love with Duncan Grant has in it a modicum of truth.)

In 1910 Roger Fry made his first appearance within Bloomsbury and almost immediately became a central figure. He was aware that for almost 30 years, Britain had more or less turned its back on developments in French art, scarcely looking at the French impressionists and ignoring the post-impressionists. His aim was to bring bundles of Cézannes, Van Goghs and Gauguins to London, to form an exhibition titled 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists'. It caused a furore, as this innovative French art seemed to challenge English notions of beauty. Fry engaged his new friends in helping to fight the cause of modern art, and thereby drew Bloomsbury out of the privacy of the drawing room into a very noisy, public debate.

Until then, no one in Bloomsbury had attracted much public notice. But in 1915 Virginia Woolf published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. Three years later Lytton Strachey produced *Eminent Victorians*. In 1919, Maynard Keynes sounded his warning on onerous war reparations. And in 1920, Roger



Humble origins Virginia Woolf with her husband, Leonard, the only member of the group not to hail from an upper middle-class background

INTELLECTUAL ARISTOCRATS

Five leading lights of the Bloomsbury Group

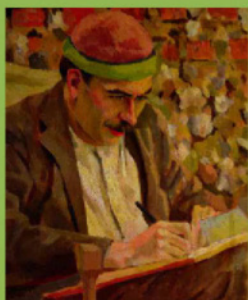
THE CELEBRATED ECONOMIST

John Maynard Keynes

In his final year at King's College, Cambridge, Keynes (1883–1946) could not decide whether his main intellectual preoccupation should be economics or moral philosophy. He opted for the former in 1908, took up a lectureship and in 1915 joined the Treasury. His book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) placed him at the centre of a controversy about the economic reconstruction of Europe.

In addition to an incredibly busy working life, Keynes found time to make and lose several speculative fortunes, marry the ballerina Lydia Lopokova, form a picture and book collection, set up the Arts Theatre in Cam-

bridge and spearhead the creation of the Arts Council of Great Britain.



THE MAN OF PASSIONS

Duncan Grant

Grant (1885–1978) had a quietly festive character that irradiated the lives of many. He never tried to manipulate others but took them on their own terms. People of both sexes and all ages fell in love with him. In old age – he lived to be 93 – he continued to make young friends.

Grant thought that painting was one of the great professions and that everyone who so much as picked up a brush was blessed. He himself experimented with styles with various degrees of success but always with an eagerness and an ability to create a sense of flow, in the handling of colour and form. His

long and powerful relationship with Vanessa Bell ran alongside his many passions for men.



THE ANARCHIC MIND

Lytton Strachey

Having begun life as an intensely nervous, lanky, invalidish schoolboy, Strachey (1880–1932) encountered a liberal attitude at Cambridge that licensed his delight in bawdy humour and salacious wit. He increasingly displayed a subtly anarchic mind that exposed the preposterous, the sad or absurd in human beings. He followed his book *Eminent Victorians* with a life of Queen Victoria and then *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History*.

Strachey attracted the devotion of Dora Carrington, and, though homosexual, agreed to set up home with her. She compared their routine existence to that of the hens, outwardly “every day the same, apparently”, but

inside “what a variety and what fantastic doings. And great schemes I suspect.”



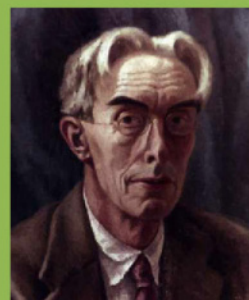
THE RENEGADE IMPRESARIO

Roger Fry

Fry (1866–1934) studied natural sciences at Cambridge and then painting under Francis Bate. Initially he distrusted modern art, especially that exhibited by his peers in the New English Art, which seemed weakly imitative of French Impressionism. His attention turned instead to the Old Masters.

He gained a job as European adviser to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Shocked to discover the Met's chairman, J Pierpoint Morgan, had been putting his own interests as a collector before those of the museum, Fry made his own opinions on this known and immediately lost his job.

He went on to become the impresario of the new movement in art that sprang into being after he became involved with modern art, through his two post-impressionist exhibitions.

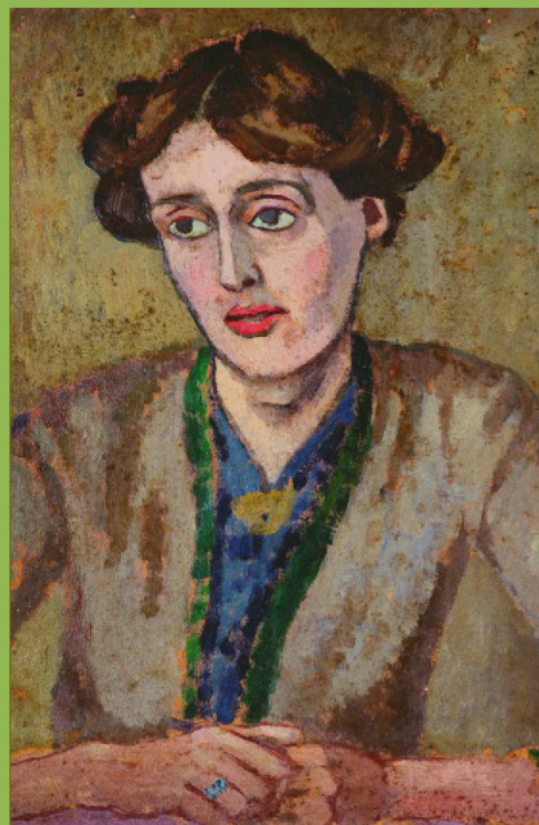


THE VOICE OF MODERNISM

Virginia Woolf

Woolf was mostly educated at home, by governesses and by her father who had begun his career as a Cambridge don and had a large library. “Gracious child, how you gobble,” he remarked of her hunger for books. Almost seven years before she published her first novel, she announced: “I shall reform the novel.” And in the course of her writing career, she did just that, becoming a significant influence on the development of the modernist novel, even though her books were all very different from each other.

Woolf (1882–1941) suffered recurrent bouts of mental illness, her husband, Leonard, seeing her through her worst period of illness in 1915. Her books find admirers all round the world and her polemical writings have made her a major voice in the women's movement.



ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN/TOFFOTO

Fry published *Vision and Design*, a book of essays on art, written from the modern point of view, and still in print today. But this was just the beginning of Bloomsbury's impact on culture in Britain between two world wars.

Although London, as a cultural hub and a site of modernity, was Bloomsbury's main setting, they also regularly retreated to the country, and enjoyed its different rhythms. The most famous Bloomsbury residence is Charleston, where the Bloomsbury decorative style spread like some vigorous vegetable growth throughout the whole house. It sits at the foot of Firlie Beacon, on the South Downs.

Charleston's beauty made it an outstanding place to visit, but what attracted many of its Bloomsbury guests was the way Vanessa Bell (who lived there with Duncan Grant) managed hospitality without fuss. This farmhouse is only four miles away from Rodmell, also in Sussex, where Leonard and Virginia Woolf had a country retreat. Much toing and froing went on between the two houses. "Charleston is as usual," Virginia Woolf wrote in the summer of 1922. "One hears Clive shouting in the garden before one arrives. Nessa emerges from a great variegated quilt of asters and artichokes; not very cordial... Then Duncan drifts in, also vague, absent-minded, and incredibly wrapped round with yellow waistcoats, spotted ties, and old blue stained painting jackets."

An irritating clique?

The Bloomsbury Group was a remarkably long-standing phenomenon. During the early 1940s, it set up the Memoir Club, to spur its members into writing about the past, in a philosophical or entertaining manner, and to revive again the habit of meeting regularly. In c1943, Vanessa Bell produced a group portrait of the club (shown above). As three of its members – Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry and Virginia Woolf – had by then died, she included on the background wall miniature copies of known portraits of them all. The picture can be found today in London's National Portrait Gallery.

As time went on, the fact that Bloomsbury was to some extent a clique irritated many. It began to attract criticism, and it was not until the last quarter of the 20th century that its admirers began vastly to exceed its critics.

After the Second World War, Virginia Woolf's diaries, which filled more than 30 volumes, sat silent in the vault of the National Westminster bank in Lewes. In America her fame as a novelist began to fade, and by the 1960s her name for many young American women was more readily connected with Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962) than with any of her own works.

An important landmark, in the revival of



Woolf's writings reach across the cultural divides of gender, class, race and education

Brains trust Vanessa Bell's c1943 painting of the Memoir Club, which attempted to revive the spirit of the Bloomsbury Group's heyday. As well as Bloomsbury veterans like Duncan Grant (far left), the club also boasted younger members, such as Clive and Vanessa Bell's son, Quentin (far right)

interest in Woolf, was the two-volume biography of her, written by her nephew Quentin Bell at the request of Leonard Woolf. It was the first official biography, came out in 1972 and opened her life to the public. The demand for her books rocketed. Still today *A Room of One's Own* is cited in booklists for courses in women's studies. It is a product of deep reflection on women, society, literature, and what matters in life, but it is delivered in a light, gently ironical, conversational tone.

Today Woolf's writings reach across the usual cultural divides of gender, class, education, race and nationality, thereby altering and enriching millions of lives. Virginia Woolf Societies and annual conferences on her work flourish in countries and cultures very different to her own.

Suppleness of mind

Bloomsbury was above all impressive in the loyalty its members gave to their friends. By fostering close association within Bloomsbury, they opened themselves to new areas of thought and feeling, encouraged a suppleness of mind and developed an emotional intelligence that valued tolerance.

True, most did come from upper middle-class families, which Noel Annan described as the "intellectual aristocracy", but they had no time for the pursuit of social

prestige or for the display of wealth. They rated the life of the mind as more important than material gain, and when Leonard Woolf became a publisher, he never published a book for commercial reasons alone. He worked with others to create the League of Nations and advised the Labour Party on international politics.

Maynard Keynes, as a leading economist, remains famous for overturning the prevailing idea that free markets would automatically provide full employment. The artists Fry, Bell and Grant not only created the Omega Workshops (1913–19) but continued to play a key role within the production of art and decorative arts in Britain.

In 1925, in one of the rare occasions when Virginia Woolf commented on the group, she praised her Bloomsbury friends for "having worked out a view of life which was not by any means corrupt and sinister or merely intellectual: rather ascetic and austere indeed; which still holds, and keeps them dining together, and staying together, after 20 years; and no amount of quarrelling or success, or failure has altered this. Now I do think," she concludes, "this rather creditable." **H**

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Frances Spalding is emeritus fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge and author of *The Real and the Romantic: English Art Between Two World Wars* (Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2022)



Charleston is the museum partner of the **London Art Fair** (organised by Immediate Media, who also publish this magazine).

It runs from 17–21 January 2024. londonartfair.co.uk

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

What is the world's oldest surviving recipe?

»» If we take this to mean the oldest surviving *written* recipe, most historians would agree with Guinness World Records, which confers this accolade on a set of recipes inscribed on three clay slabs dating from around 1700 BC. These tablets were made by people of the Sumerian culture of Mesopotamia, a region spanning what is now part of Iraq and surrounding countries.

In the mid-1980s, French historian Jean Bottéro translated the texts, inscribed in a cuneiform script – one of the world's oldest forms of writing – and discovered that they describe meals. The best-preserved tablet contains lists of ingredients for 25 dishes, and the two other slabs feature more-detailed instructions (though still only a few lines each) for about 10 recipes.

Dishes described on the slabs include a lamb-and-beet stew similar to borscht, a vegetarian stew of leeks and onions, and a lamb and milk broth. Another

recipe layers dough and fowl meat in a milky sauce to make a kind of pie.

Based on archaeological evidence and later written records, researchers in Wales claim to have reconstructed an even earlier recipe dating back some 6,000 years. To make 'nettle pudding', a mixture of stinging nettles, ground barley and water was shaped into a ball and placed into an animal's intestine so that it could be boiled in a broth. Today, nettles are widely viewed as irksome weeds, but they lose their sting when cooked and are actually nutritious greens that were commonly consumed well into the 20th century in some parts of the UK. The newly deciphered recipe produces a Stone-Age version of dumplings or something similar to haggis.

.....
Eleanor Barnett, food historian at Cardiff University. Her new book, *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation*, will be published by Head of Zeus on 14 March

Cuneiform script inscribed nearly four millennia ago details a recipe similar to borscht (pictured left)



As this 19th-century illustration demonstrates, by the Victorian era pointed dunce caps were used to humiliate children

Were pointed dunce caps actually once symbols of intelligence, not stupidity?

»» The original 'dunce' was Scottish Catholic priest and theologian John Duns Scotus (c1265–1308), whose scholastic philosophy was later seen in Protestant countries as being arcane and pedantic. Perhaps as a consequence, in Elizabeth I's time a 'Duns' could be an ignoramus – or, confusingly, someone who spent too much time studying.

By the late 18th century, though, a dunce was no longer the bookish kid, but simply one awarded the pointy hat for being unwilling or unable to learn.

Conical hats were common in the Middle Ages, when they weren't particularly associated with intelligence. Hats ending in sharp points were also worn by Spanish Catholics in ceremonies as a symbol of penitence, pointing heavenwards to draw attention away from the sinner who donned such unusual headwear.

It's often claimed that Duns Scotus favoured a conical cap as a symbol of learning, or even as a means of reverse-funnelling knowledge into his head. However, there's little evidence that he ever believed this.

.....
Eugene Byrne, journalist and author

Did US president Abraham Lincoln really store important papers in his top hat?

»» Lincoln had a brilliant mind – but a messy office. His top hat brought some order to the chaos by acting as a safe place to store important papers, especially those to which he needed easy access. However, letters could go missing for days at a time if he swapped one hat for another.

He developed the habit while a young lawyer in Illinois. Even as president, when he had a personal secretary to help manage his affairs, Lincoln continued to stash documents in the lining of his hat.

The 16th president's hat was more than just a wearable briefcase: it also provided a boost to his already formidable stature. Bareheaded, Lincoln stood six feet four inches tall – the loftiest president in US history. Having donned his hat, he towered over virtually all of his advisors and generals.

Lincoln's trademark stovepipe hat accompanied him at key moments in the American Civil War. When touring the fallen Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia on 4 April 1865, Lincoln was approached by an elderly black man who gave a low bow. Lincoln removed his hat to return the gesture – and in so doing “upset the forms, laws, customs, and ceremonies of centuries”, according to a reporter from the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Ten days later, Lincoln was back in Washington, DC for a performance of *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theater. Partway through the play, actor and Confederate sympathiser John Wilkes Booth entered Lincoln's box and shot the president in the back of the head. Rushed to a nearby home for treatment, Lincoln died early the next morning. In the pandemonium, a single item was left behind in the presidential box, a memento to the slain president: his top hat.

Kevin Waite, associate professor at Durham University



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DID YOU KNOW...?

Birth control

Mistakenly believing that female elephants spin in a circle just before giving birth, an American engineer and inventor patented a device that would enable pregnant women to do the same. In 1963, George Blonsky produced plans for an “Apparatus for Facilitating the Birth of a Child by Centrifugal Force”. Basically, a pregnant woman was strapped to a circular table that was then rotated, supposedly providing “propelling force” to make the birth easier. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Blonsky's idea never caught on.



Elephants inspired a curious birthing tool

Hot topic

An Anglo-Saxon queen accused of conducting an affair with a bishop is said to have walked over nine red-hot ploughshares to prove her innocence. Emma – who was married first to Æthelred the Unready and then to that English king's successor, Cnut – supposedly endured the trial by ordeal in the nave of Winchester Cathedral, demonstrating her innocence by emerging unscathed. The story was first told in the 13th century, some 200 years after Emma's death, and is likely apocryphal.

Tragic triumph

In 1923, a jockey named Frank Hayes rode to victory in a steeplechase – despite the fact that he was dead when he crossed the finishing line. Mounted on a horse named Sweet Kiss, Hayes suffered a fatal heart attack during the race. With his rider slumped in the saddle, Sweet Kiss completed the course at New York's Belmont Park, powering home as winner against the odds. It was only after the race was over that spectators realised that the unfortunate jockey had died. **H**

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

Nicholas Winton

The British Schindler

In 1939, as the Nazis closed in on Czechoslovakia, hundreds of Jewish children were transported to safety in Britain. **EDWARD ABEL SMITH** tells the story of a young British man at the heart of these rescue efforts

In the early hours of Saturday 1 July 1939, 10-year-old Věra Diamantová was jerked suddenly awake. Her train had lurched roughly across a railway junction on its way out of Czechoslovakia (today divided between the Czech Republic and Slovakia). As Vera's eyes adjusted to the pitch-dark carriage, she could just make out some of the other 240 children, mostly Jewish and aged 3–15, crammed in around her. Sitting next to Vera was six-year-old Alfred, who recalled years later that, when leaving the Czech capital of Prague, "I was aware of my mother's nervousness, but I did not understand the reason why... for me it was a holiday trip and a tremendous adventure."

The children aboard that train came from widely different backgrounds and had very little in common – except that almost none of them would ever see their parents again. They were among 669 children who, between 14 March and 2 August 1939, left behind their families in Czechoslovakia and were evacuated to England thanks to a small group of individuals headed by Nicholas Winton.

Born in 1909 to German Jewish parents, Winton grew up in north London, where his family suffered ostracism because of their Jewish heritage. They lived there in an enormous 20-roomed house that was managed by four members of staff including a cook and a nanny. "We weren't, by any means, rich... our class was, I suppose, moderately middle class," Winton later reflected.

At the age of 14, Winton was sent to the newly opened Stowe School in Buckinghamshire, where the eccentric headmaster taught his students the skills necessary to be "acceptable at a dance and invaluable in a shipwreck". While there, Winton enjoyed an eclectic range of hobbies including rugby, horse riding, fencing and pigeon-fancying. Although his academic results were mixed, he left Stowe with a set of strong beliefs and an impressive work ethic.

Winton's father – whose glass-importing business was slowly failing – encouraged his son to go straight into work in order to

help support the family financially. "Father was very keen that I should become a banker," Winton recalled, somewhat resentfully. Although he never really enjoyed banking, the job enabled him to live in Germany for a year in 1929, where he witnessed first hand the dire impact of the economic depression on the country.

Winton's life changed forever when his close friend Martin Blake cancelled a skiing holiday arranged to celebrate new year 1938–39. The day before their flight, Blake called Winton to say: "I'm going out to Prague tomorrow... Give up your winter sports holidays and come and join me." Intrigued, Winton swapped his ski outfit for a thick woollen suit, and changed his plane ticket to book the next available seat to Czechoslovakia.

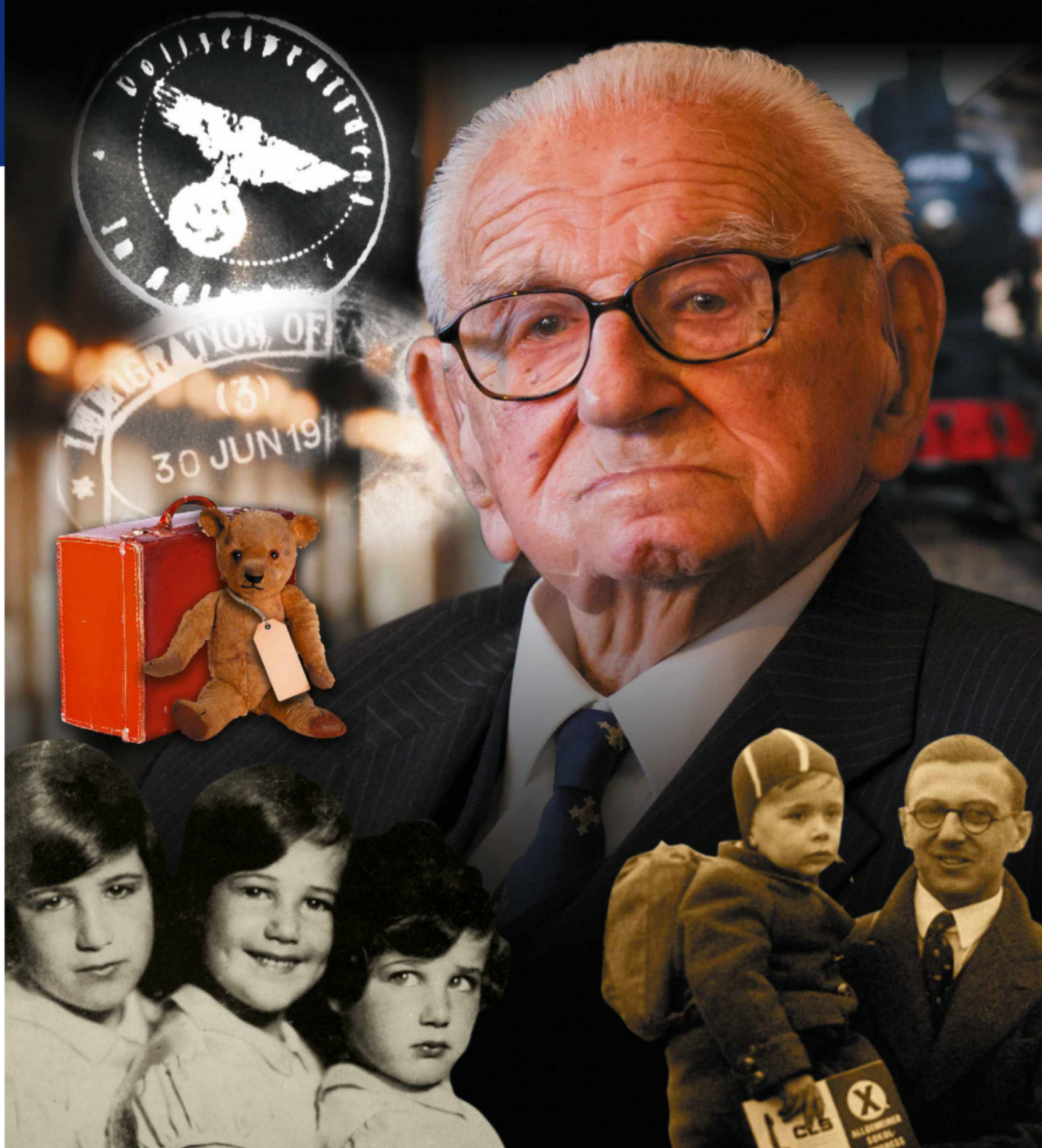
Evacuation in action

Nothing could have prepared him for what he experienced when he arrived in Prague on 31 December 1938. In a bid to appease Adolf Hitler, earlier that year western powers had agreed to allow Germany to take control of the part of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland. This thin slither of territory bordering Germany had been incorporated into Czechoslovakia after the First World War, when Austria-Hungary was dismembered. The advent of Nazi rule in the Sudetenland immediately sparked a mass exodus of terrified citizens, many of them Jewish and only too aware of the persecution they would face under German control. Perhaps 200,000 refugees swarmed into Prague, desperately seeking safety.

Arriving in the Czech capital, Winton was faced with sprawling refugee camps, homeless people wandering the freezing streets, and terrified, lost children who had become separated from their parents. It was clearly only a matter of time before the Nazis invaded the rest of the country, so Winton immediately offered his services to the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, alongside Blake. The Prague office was led by a remarkable woman called Doreen Warriner, an academic from England who had also changed her travel plans, forgoing a research fellowship in the Caribbean in order to help people suffering in Prague's sub-zero temperatures.

She was immediately impressed by Winton. "Miss Warriner has already asked me to be secretary of a children's committee," he wrote to his mother on his second night in the country. Having only three weeks in Prague

// The advent of Nazi rule in the Sudetenland immediately sparked a mass exodus of terrified citizens //



ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO

Nicholas Winton (shown, centre, in old age and, bottom right, as a young man with one of the children he saved) helped 669 children escape from Nazi control, but rarely spoke about his actions in later life

COLLAGE BY ROSEMARY SMITH

before he needed to return home for work – and with little help from Blake, who was there for only a few days – Winton immediately set to work trying to understand the practicalities of enabling unaccompanied children to escape the country.

Herculean effort

The task was Herculean. Winton and his colleagues needed to establish the mode by which children could travel, gather the paperwork to enable their exit from Czechoslovakia and into Britain, and finally source families who might foster these children upon their arrival.

Winton began the daunting job of gathering the details of all Jewish children whose parents were desperate to get them to safety. Queues of families would form outside his hotel room from 6am each day, and Winton met each of them in order to create a lengthy list of children. Meanwhile, he set his mother to work in London arranging the necessary travel documents.

As his three weeks in Prague came to an end, Winton flew back to Britain on 21 January 1939 clutching a file with the details of 5,000 children he desperately wanted to help. At that point, Trevor Chadwick – another British man who travelled to Czechoslovakia to offer assistance –



A contradictory hero

Roger Moorhouse explores the life of Oskar Schindler:
historyextra.com/oskar-schindler



Refugees from the Sudetenland take shelter in Prague's Masaryk Stadium, September 1938. Six months later, Germany invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia



Appearing on *That's Life* in 1988, Nicholas Winton was surrounded by many of those he'd rescued from Prague, including writer Vera Gissing (above, right). They presented him with a ring (right) inscribed: "Save one life, save the world"



took over operations in Prague. Meanwhile, Winton assembled a small team in London – including his mother and Blake – and began trying to find families in Britain who were willing to offer homes to the children on his list. Working as a stockbroker by day, he returned each evening to his flat where he would continue his humanitarian task, writing endless letters to potential foster parents and other people who might be able to donate money.

Journey to safety

A few weeks after leaving Prague, Winton stood with his mother on a damp railway platform at London's Liverpool Street station, where a green steam train carrying the first 20 children from Prague came to a stop. As they descended from the carriages, Winton introduced each child to his or her new foster parents, and watched them leave to start a new life in England. This became a routine for him over the next few months, greeting each train as it arrived. "I really don't quite know how we

managed to sort the chaos which ensued when the train pulled in," he later reflected.

In total, 669 children, mostly Jewish, escaped Prague in this way – until such transports were cancelled just before Britain entered the war. Tragically, many thousands of other Jewish Czech children not lucky enough to get a place on one of the eight trains organised by Winton suffered very different rail journeys to Nazi concentration and death camps. Only a handful of them survived.

It was not just Winton's modesty that prevented him from speaking about his actions in 1939, but also a sense of sadness for those children he was not able to save. His achievements became widely known only when he was invited onto Esther Rantzen's show *That's Life* in 1988. In a moving piece of television, Winton heard his story recounted – unaware that many of those he had saved were sitting around him in the audience, meeting their rescuer for the first time since 1939. They later presented him with a ring inscribed with words from the Talmud: "Save one life, save the world." Winton died, aged 106, in 2015. **H**

Edward Abel Smith is the author of *The British Oskar Schindler: The Life and Work of Nicholas Winton* (Pen & Sword, 2023)



Nicholas Winton is the subject of new biopic *One Life*, released on 1 January

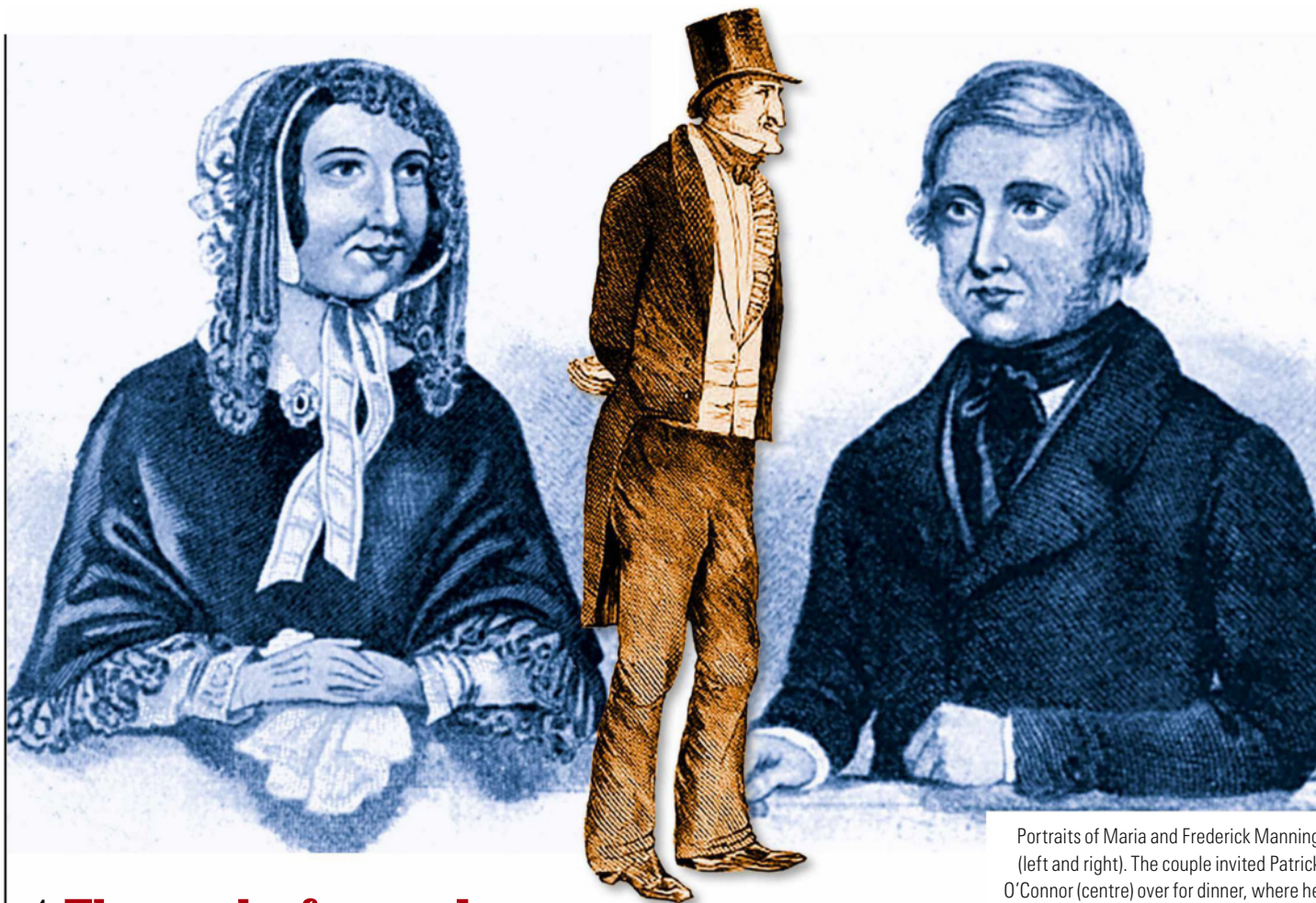
// Winton heard his story recounted, unaware that many of those he had saved were sitting around him in the audience //

Accompanies
series three of
*Lady Killers with
Lucy Worsley*

BBC
SOUNDS

**“I loved her
so much that
I wanted
her to die
loving me”**

Rosalind Crone, historical consultant on the
BBC series *Lady Killers with Lucy Worsley*,
reveals what six murder cases tell us about
women's lives in the 19th century



Portraits of Maria and Frederick Manning (left and right). The couple invited Patrick O'Connor (centre) over for dinner, where he was murdered and buried under flagstones

1 The mark of a murderer

Swiss maid **Maria Manning** was convicted for the killing of a former lover. But might she have been the victim of gender stereotyping?

It was a stain between two flagstones that gave the game away. On 17 August 1849, two policemen were conducting a search for a missing customs officer named Patrick O'Connor. For days they had been collecting information about O'Connor's last known movements, and this had led them to a house in Bermondsey, London.

At first the officers found nothing. In fact, they were about to leave the house when Constable Barnes noticed the damp mark. The stain suggested that the flagstones in the kitchen had recently been re-laid, and so the policemen started digging. When they got 18 inches down, Barnes "discovered the loins of a man... it was lying on the belly, and the legs were brought back and tied up round the haunches with a strong cord... it was quite naked."

Nowhere to be seen

Dental records confirmed the body was Patrick O'Connor. On 9 August, O'Connor had been invited to dine with the occupants of 3 Miniver Place: Frederick Manning and

his Swiss wife, Maria. O'Connor had met Maria when she was a lady's maid for the Duchess of Sutherland's daughter. They began a relationship but, when he was slow to propose, Maria married Frederick, a guard on the Western Railway. Tough times had brought Maria and Frederick to London, and Maria had rekindled her affair with the well-off O'Connor. But on 17 August, Maria and Frederick Manning were nowhere to be seen.

The police launched a massive manhunt. Maria was captured in Edinburgh trying to

When the police got 18 inches down, they found "the loins of a man... it was lying on the belly... and it was quite naked"

sell railway shares belonging to O'Connor. Frederick, who had made it to Jersey, was recognised by an old acquaintance. Both were brought back to London to stand trial.

They appeared in the dock at the Old Bailey on 25 and 26 October 1849, each intent on blaming the other. Maria's barrister claimed that Frederick killed O'Connor in a jealous rage. Speaking for Frederick, Sergeant Wilkins deployed prominent gender stereotypes. He argued that, while history showed that women could display higher levels of virtue than men, "once she gives way to vice she sinks far lower than our sex. My hypothesis is that the female prisoner... premeditated, planned and concocted the murder; and that she made her husband her dupe... for that purpose."

The jury condemned them both. Maria raged against the verdict. "I am a foreigner, and I have been denied justice... I have not been treated like a Christian, but like a wild beast of the forest." But to no avail. She and her husband were hanged, side-by-side, on the roof of Horsemonger Lane Gaol on 13 November 1849 before a crowd of perhaps 50,000 spectators, among them Charles Dickens.

2 A terrible secret

Fear of the stigma of an illegitimate child led **Jane Boyd** to commit a horrific crime

Historians have suggested that infanticide might have been a weekly event in mid-19th-century Ireland. In many of these cases, it was a means of dealing with illegitimacy at a time when fatherless babies were stigmatised and brought great financial hardship to mothers.

And so, on 26 October 1861, when Ann Boyd – an unmarried teenager from Ballykeel who had recently returned home from a spell as a domestic servant – went into labour, her mother, Jane, panicked.

Living in a small cottage in a tightly knit community, it was difficult to hide what was happening. Ann's brother James, who had just come home for his dinner, noticed the commotion. "I sat in the kitchen and heard my sister screaming," he later testified. "Then, after my sister screamed, I heard the sound of a child... It did not cry very long. It gave three cries."

Around one o'clock, neighbours James and Mary Hill saw Jane digging a hole. "It's a strange time to be digging in a garden," Mary remarked to Jane. Other neighbours and extended family who called on the Boyds that afternoon noticed that Ann was very ill and told Jane to call a doctor.

Dr Dunlop, the parish medical officer, came the next day. After examining Ann, and finding that she had recently given birth, he sent for Constable Waters of the Holywood Barracks. Confronted by the two men, Jane, who had insisted that her daughter had suffered a miscarriage, cracked. "There was a child," she confessed, "and it was buried in the garden. The child was dead, born dead."

Maximum penalty

At the foot of an elm tree, Waters and Dunlop recovered the body of a baby girl, in a shallow grave hidden underneath some large cabbages.

Following an inquest, Jane was charged with murder and was sent, with Ann, to Downpatrick Gaol to await trial. At the 11th hour, a deal was struck. Jane and Ann pleaded guilty to concealment of birth and the prosecution dropped the charge of murder. Ann was sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour. The judge was entirely convinced that Jane had killed the baby, and so gave her the maximum penalty: two years' imprisonment with hard labour.



The interior of a small rural Irish cottage at the Ulster Folk Museum, probably similar to the one in which unwed teenager Ann Boyd gave birth – and in which her mother, Jane, likely murdered the newborn infant

**"After my sister screamed,
I heard the sound of a child...
It did not cry very long. It gave
three cries"**



Aboriginal children at Myora Mission in Queensland, 1896. The mission escaped serious censure following the death of a young girl in its care

3 Missionary violence

Marie Christensen's brutal treatment of a child of Aboriginal descent exposed the iniquities of Australia's policies towards Indigenous people

In 1896, a girl called Cassey was sent to the reformatory school at Myora Mission in Moreton Bay, Queensland. Cassey – who was described as being about five years old and “half caste” – was a weak child, suffering ill health as well as, in the words of the mission superintendent, being “dull and not in as good spirits as the others”.

She was far from the only child to make such a journey. In late 19th-century Australia, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were forced to live on reserves and missions, where they were segregated from white settler communities. Policies of assimilation enabled the authorities to remove children of Aboriginal descent from their parents and send them to reformatory schools where they were trained to enter white society as domestic servants and farm labourers. All this was done under the guise of ‘protection’. But for Cassey, protection was in short supply.

On 14 September, the mission matron, Marie Christensen, took Cassey to the tidal springs at the bottom of the hill to bathe. When the child refused, Christensen forced her into the water. Budlo Lefu, a First Nations woman who lived on the mission, watched the matron “ducking the child up and down in the sea”. When the matron dragged the child back up the hill, beating her with a stick and kicking her, Budlo “came to stop her and she told me I had nothing to do with it [so] I

Marie hurried Cassey into the dormitory where she continued the beating. Five days later, Cassey died

went away”. Christensen hurried Cassey into the dormitory where she continued the beating. Five days later, Cassey died.

Recording Indigenous voices

The refusal of the attending doctor to issue a medical certificate triggered an inquest – at that time a rare event on the death of an Indigenous person. In another unusual twist, the local justice of the peace, William North, collected testimony from Indigenous women who lived on the mission, committing their voices to the historical record.

Christensen was charged with manslaughter. In return for a guilty plea, the prosecution spoke on her behalf, claiming she was “of imperfect brain development”. She received a suspended sentence, and the Myora Mission (indeed, the whole system) escaped serious scrutiny. The reformatory school was quickly shut down, and Cassey's peers were moved on. The Myora Mission continued until 1942.



4 Killing in the name of love

Alice Mitchell's vicious attack on a childhood sweetheart challenged contemporary attitudes towards female same-sex relationships

In the eyes of most residents of 19th-century Tennessee, female same-sex love was abnormal. Though some young, unmarried women had close, even openly affectionate friendships with female peers, hardly anyone thought for a second that there would be any kind of sexual element to these relationships. Such assumptions were dramatically challenged in early 1892 by two teenage girls: Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward.

Alice and Freda had become close friends after meeting at Higbee School for Young Ladies in Memphis. In 1891, when Freda moved to the town of Golddust on the Mississippi river to live with her older sister and widowed father, Alice and Freda were able to sustain their relationship through visits and letters. When they stayed together, they shared a bed, as expected. When apart, the girls

declared their love for each other in writing. Alice even bought Freda an engagement ring and proposed marriage, declaring that she would live as a man, 'Alvin J Ward', to make their union possible.

Jealous rage

Freda, however, was keeping her options open. In Golddust, she began to entertain male suitors, in particular a man called Ashley Roselle. Alice was enraged. "I love you Fred, and would kill Ashley before I would see him take you from me," she warned in one letter.

In August 1891, the girls devised a plan to elope, but it was discovered by Freda's sister, who became determined to end the relationship.

Freda returned Alice's engagement ring. Alice, however, could not accept that the relationship was over. When, in January 1892, Freda visited Memphis to stay with a friend, Alice tried writing to her once more. But her letters were returned unopened and, when they met in the street, Freda refused to acknowledge her. To explain her actions, Freda wrote Alice one final letter: "I love you now and always will but I have been forbidden to speak to you and I have to obey."

Just days later, Alice stabbed Freda to death as she tried to board the steamer back to Golddust. In her confession, Alice explained that she "resolved to kill Freda because I loved her so much that I wanted her to die loving me".

A verdict of insanity ensured that Alice avoided the gallows, and society could continue to define female same-sex relationships as an aberration.

Alice Mitchell stabs her lover, Freda Ward, to death, shown in a contemporary illustration.

A court declared that the killing was an act of insanity



5 Victims of the “black cloud”

In 1841, **Mary Ann Brough** secured the illustrious position of wet nurse to the Prince of Wales. But a marital dispute sent her life spiralling out of control

In 1834, George Brough, a groundsman at Claremont House, a royal residence in Esher, married one of the domestic servants, Mary Ann. In 1841, shortly after the birth of her fourth child, Mary Ann secured the illustrious position of wet nurse to the queen's first son, Bertie (later Edward VII). Victoria herself remembered Mary Ann from visits to Claremont. Just months later, though, Mary Ann was dismissed, allegedly for drunkenness.

At home in Esher, she went on to have yet more children – 10 in total, though only seven survived infancy. There were difficulties in her marriage with George, too. By the early 1850s, George had become a house servant at Claremont, often staying on site. His wife began an affair.

Suspecting as much, in the summer of 1854 George hired a private detective, who reported that Mary Ann had spent time with a man from Esher in a “questionable house” in London. Angry and upset, on 6 June George left the family home. The next day, when he returned to collect his

nightcap, he declared: “I intend to see a solicitor to start legal proceedings and to get full custody of the children.”

In mid-19th century England, a mother found guilty of wrongdoing – such as adultery – could lose all contact with her children. Mary Ann now faced the real prospect of being separated from them.

Two days later, on the evening of 9 June, Mary Ann slit the throats of the six children who lived with her, aged between 21 months

and 12 years, before attempting to kill herself. She made a full confession to the police, claiming that a “black cloud” had come over her. But to the woman who was nursing her, she said: “He left me with no money and was going to take the children away from me. I was not going to allow him to do so.”

Pain and bleeding

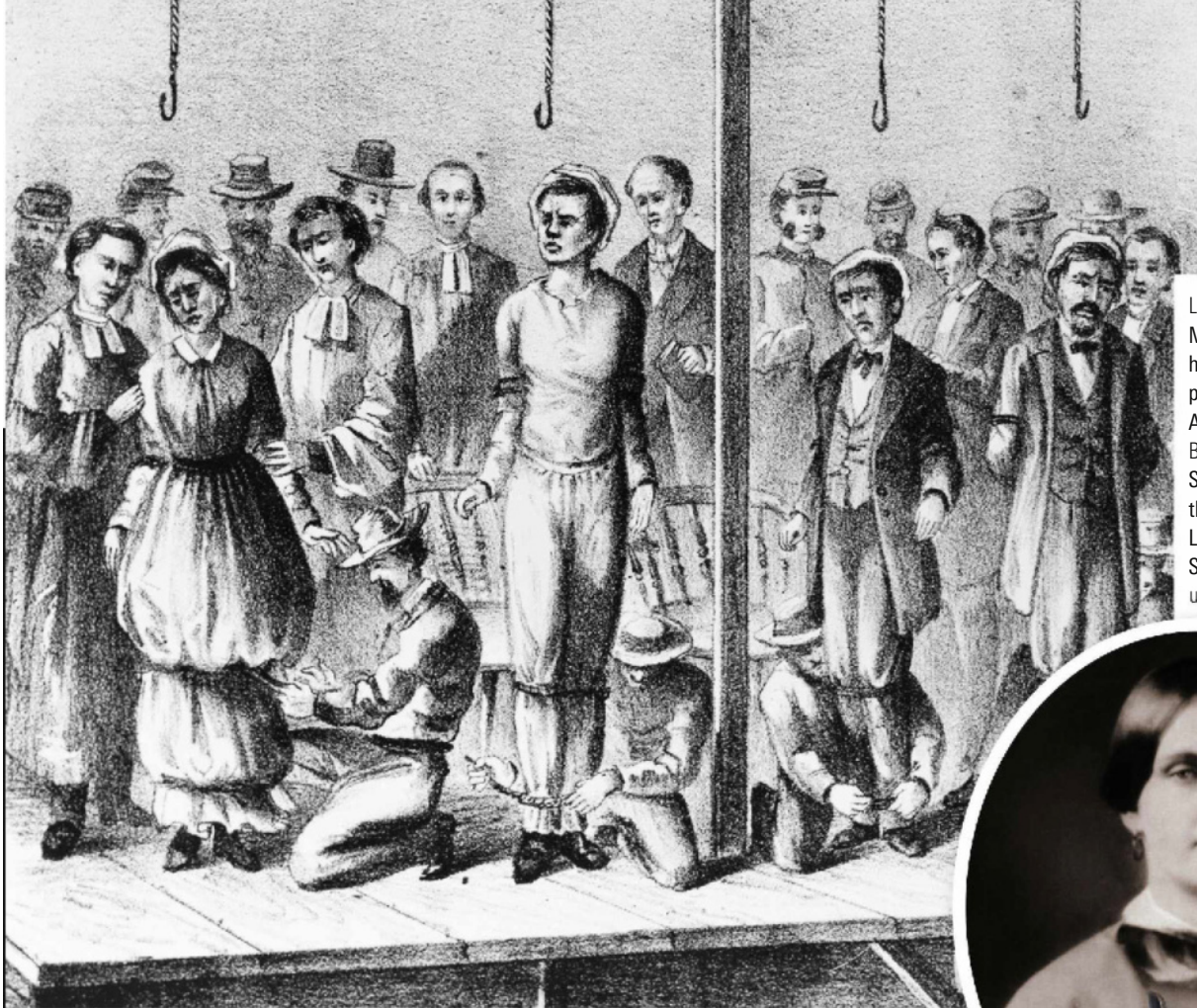
At Mary Ann's trial on 9 August, the jury accepted her plea of insanity. Neighbours and her doctor testified that she was a loving mother who had suffered ill health – pain in the head, bleeding from her nose and a suspected stroke – following the birth of her youngest child. The eminent psychiatrist Forbes B Winslow recognised her account of “the black cloud”, explaining that mothers could experience bouts of temporary insanity when under significant stress.

Insanity also provided contemporaries with a way to explain the unexplainable: a mother who killed her six children. Mary Ann was sent to Bethlem Asylum, where she died on 18 March 1861 from paralysis and apoplexy.

A psychiatrist noted that mothers could experience bouts of insanity when under significant stress



Queen Victoria and Albert discover a wet nurse about to give alcohol to their first son in a 19th-century print – possibly satirising Mary Ann Brough, who later killed six of her own children



LEFT: A drawing showing Mary Surratt just before her execution for plotting to assassinate Abraham Lincoln

BELOW: A portrait of Surratt, and a handgun of the type used to murder Lincoln. It's believed that Surratt passed on firearms used by the conspirators



6 Plotting to kill the president

Mary Surratt's warning that "something is going to happen" to Abraham Lincoln helped secure her an unwanted place in history

When we think of the murder of Abraham Lincoln, we tend to remember his assassin, John Wilkes Booth, who fired the deadly shot at Ford's Theatre in Washington DC on 14 April 1865. Booth was himself later shot dead by troops at a barn in northern Virginia – yet he wasn't the only conspirator to die in the fallout to the murder. Four people were hanged for their role in the assassination of America's 16th president – and one of them was a woman.

Mary Surratt was a devout Catholic convert, an enslaver and a supporter of the Confederacy who, following the death of her alcoholic husband in 1862, was thrust into the world of business. She managed the family farm and tavern in Maryland until, in the autumn of 1864, she moved to Washington with two of her children, and set up a boarding house there.

Mary's new address soon became a hive of activity. Confederate agents were frequent lodgers and visitors, among them Booth. Mary's son, John Surratt Jr, was a close friend of Booth, whose charisma won over both Mary and her daughter, Ann.

In March 1865, on the eve of Lincoln's inauguration as president for a second term, Mary made a fateful comment that one of her boarders remembered: "Something is going to happen to Old Abe, which will prevent him from taking his seat." Mary, it seems, not only knew of the plans to assassinate Lincoln but likely aided and abetted the conspirators by hiding and passing on firearms.

Assisting an assassin

Following the assassination, while Booth was still on the run, Mary was arrested along with seven male suspects. Mary was charged with the murder of Abraham Lincoln, attempting to kill the vice president and secretary of state, and assisting Booth in the assassination and his subsequent escape.

Following a trial by a military tribunal, Mary and the seven male conspirators were found guilty. Four of the men received prison sentences but, controversially, Mary was condemned "to be hanged by the neck until she be dead". Despite desperate pleas for clemency, the sentence was carried out on

7 July 1865. Mary was the first woman to be executed by the US federal government.

Her story is a reminder that women's political engagement could take many forms – even at a time when women were officially excluded from the political sphere. Yet Mary Surratt's involvement in Lincoln's assassination did untold damage to the campaign for other women – particularly black Americans – to win political rights of their own. **H**

Rosalind Crone is professor of history at the Open University, and author of *Violent Victorians* (Manchester University Press, 2012) and *Illiterate Inmates* (Oxford University Press, 2022)



The new series of **Lady Killers with Lucy Worsley**, for which Rosalind Crone is the historical consultant, begins on 10 January. You can listen to previous episodes via BBC Sounds at bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0016pq3

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SOCIAL

"It's an ambitious book, leaping merrily from the Neolithic to the modern day"

Annie Gray is entertained by a history of British food > page 74



BOOKS



EARLY MEDIEVAL

// The plague of Justinian prompted an economic downturn that made it difficult to hold the empire together //

Peter Heather is impressed by a new biography of the eastern Roman emperor Justinian > page 72

WWII

"Accounts show how millions of 'non-Aryan' Germans absorbed a sense of racialised identity"

Christine Schmidt on a book about ordinary Germans' role in the Holocaust > page 70

PRIZE

"There is still a clear, continuing inequality between female and male writers of non-fiction"

Suzannah Lipscomb tells us about a new Women's Prize for Non-Fiction > page 75

INTERVIEW

Philippa Langley discusses her project seeking the truth about the princes in the Tower > page 66



“It was clear we had to consider the possibility that the princes survived”

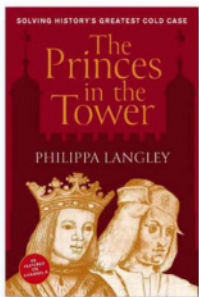
PHILIPPA LANGLEY speaks to Rebecca Franks about new discoveries made during her investigation into one of history's most enduring mysteries – the fate of the princes in the Tower

Rebecca Franks: What drew you to the mystery of the missing princes?

Philippa Langley: The inspiration for the Missing Princes Project was the Looking For Richard Project, a research operation gathering and examining information about Richard III's death and burial. The catalyst happened during the week of the reburial of Richard III in 2015. The headline of a full-page article in the *Daily Mail* said – I'm paraphrasing – something along the lines of “it's mad to make this child killer a national hero”. The article then cited the traditional narrative around that story – that after King Edward IV died on 3 April 1483 (not 9 April, as was previously believed), his sons Edward and Richard were taken to the Tower of London, and said to have been murdered there on the orders of Richard III. But there was no evidence in it. I thought: okay, maybe that take is right – but you have to go in with an evidence-based analysis and methodology. By the time I was on the train leaving Leicester after the reburial, I was putting together this new evidence-based research project.

Some sceptics might say that, in light of your work on Richard III, it would be hard for you to be an impartial investigator. Was that a question you had to confront?

One hundred per cent. It was something I had to come to terms with in my own mind, because the story of Richard murdering the two princes is so incredibly powerful. It's enmeshed in our psyche, thanks to Shakespeare's play and Sir Thomas More's literary narrative. I had to say to myself that it's about finding whatever we find. The reburial of Richard III was an attempt to make peace with the past, but I think that – because of this article in the *Daily Mail* – it was very clear that the debate was still ongoing. In order to lay Richard III to rest, we had to see if we could answer this question either way.



The Princes in the Tower: Solving History's Greatest Cold Case

by Philippa Langley
(The History Press,
488 pages, £25)

Is there anything that might have made you think that Richard III *had* been guilty of murder?

I was looking for something in the record somewhere that said the boys died, or which recorded pious prayers or observances recited for the souls of the princes. In those highly religious times, that should have been there. What we found defied expectations – and this is the first big discovery of the project – because, in all of the day-to-day administrative accounts we studied, it's business as

usual. When either of the boys are mentioned, it talks about them in terms suggesting that they remained alive.

One of the most important areas of investigation was the battle of Bosworth in 1485, when the worlds of Henry Tudor and Richard III collided head on. In exploring that event forensically, I discovered a number of key aspects, among them the entry point into England for the story of the murder of the boys – the moment when we first see it in English accounts and documents. It arrived with Henry Tudor and his French invasion force.

Henry was heading to London, because whoever holds the capital holds the kingdom, when Richard III intercepted him and cut him off at Bosworth. But Henry paused and undertook searches in the north, sending out messengers and gathering intelligence. He tried to get hold of the Yorkist heirs, and he was looking for the boys at the same time.

At that point, it became very clear that we had to widen the investigation and consider the possibility that the princes had survived.

What have you discovered about the fate of the two princes, Edward and Richard?

In terms of the elder boy [who became King Edward V on the death of his father], the most remarkable discovery was made in the archives in Lille, France in May 2020 by Albert Jan de Rooij, a member of the Dutch Research Group, part of the Missing Princes Project team, which involves more than 300 people around the world. He discovered a long-lost accounting receipt dated 16 December 1487, made out to King Maximilian I, who was one of the leading players in Europe – a powerful man who went on to become the Holy Roman Emperor.

This receipt is for his payment for 400 pikes, weapons for elite troops, which he collected in June 1487. It tells us that he paid for these weapons on behalf of a nephew of [Richard III's sister] Margaret of Burgundy – the son of King Edward IV, who was expelled from his dominion. It's very clearly telling us that this was Edward V, the elder of the princes in the Tower.

We've had the authenticity of the receipt checked by numerous experts. It's signed by Maximilian's secretary, Florens Hauweel, and names about 14 key individuals from Maximilian's court and the court of Burgundy at the time. In another section, two other leading members of Maximilian's court signed it and confirmed that all the details were accurate and correct. It's quite an astonishing find.

We already know that the Yorkist invasion of 1487, ending with the battle of Stoke on 16 June, was in support of the claim by one Edward. And we know that the coronation that took place in Dublin on 27 May 1487 was for a claimant to the English throne called King Edward. Because of the receipt, we now know that this person was the eldest son of Edward IV.



PROFILE

Philippa Langley is a historian and producer, best known for her part in the discovery of Richard III in 2012. It's a story that she told with co-author Michael Jones in *The Last King* (John Murray, originally published as *The King's Grave*), which was made into a film by Stephen Frears

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MURDO G MACLEOD

But is it not the case that the boy crowned in Dublin, and for whom the battle of Stoke was fought, was claimed by his supporters to be Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick?

No. His supporters called him 'King Edward', and the only King Edward at this time was Edward V. The Earl of Warwick had never been proclaimed king, and was barred from the throne by his father's attainder [the Duke of Clarence had been executed for treason]. The story that the boy was Warwick (at that time being held in the Tower of London) was put about by Henry VII and his supporters. This, we now know, was smoke and mirrors by Henry, so that he could claim that the Edward in Ireland was an imposter. He was later, by November 1487, given the name Lambert Simnel, purportedly a 10-year-old commoner, the son of a joiner, tailor, baker or cobbler.

One of the leading players at the 1487 coronation in Dublin was John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln. After the death of Richard's son, Edward of Middleham, Lincoln was heir apparent to Richard III. So you've basically got the man who could have been King John II of the House of York sitting in the audience to watch this unknown boy being crowned. We are meant to believe, according to the later Tudor stories, that he was happy to sit there and let a common boy be crowned in this highly religious, most holy of ceremonies. And Edward V was the only member of the House of York who had a greater claim to the throne than John de la Pole at that time. So the actions of such individuals begin to make sense.

Do you reject the theory that Lambert Simnel was an imposter?

I do, because we've now got proof of life for Edward V, in the form of Maximilian's receipt, dated over four years after the last recorded sighting of the princes in the Tower. And everything else we've discovered – including in the timelines, the person of interest files, the referencing, the cross-checking – confirms that the boy crowned in Dublin in 1487 was Edward V.

What did you discover about the other prince?

The next key document discovered by the project relates to the younger of the princes, Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York. It's a

// Our project found a witness statement in a Dutch archive written in the first person: the story of Richard, Duke of York, the younger prince //

manuscript that was first discovered in the 1950s but was dismissed by a Dutch historian who said: oh, this is nothing – this is just the story of the imposter York – and it was just put back into the archive. But then, in November 2020, another member of the Dutch Research Group, Nathalie Nijman-Bliekendaal, came across the same document in the Gelderland Archive in the Netherlands.

It really is astonishing. This is a semi-legal document – a witness statement – written in the first person. In it, Richard tells what happened to him, from leaving sanctuary in Westminster in 1483 to arriving at the court of his aunt, Margaret of Burgundy, in 1493. It's a 10-year account of his experiences after the death of his father.

What evidence is there that this account is authentic?

First, the information in the manuscript itself, and second, the checks we undertook afterwards. It's a four-page manuscript that includes detail after detail about his story. Police specialists confirmed that if someone is lying, they're loose about details, but if somebody is telling you the truth, they'll give you detail after detail. The document names some 20 individuals – key members of the Yorkist court, and other people who would have been at the Tower of London at the time. And Richard also names 19 places he's been.

One of the Dutch Research Group members, Jean Roefstra, went into all the administrative day-to-day accounts in Holland, looking for this individual and trying to see if he's given any other names – for example, Perkin Warbeck, which is what he was later called by the Tudor authorities. But he couldn't find that name anywhere – and he's been searching for years now. The only names he could find are Richard, Duke of York, or the son of Edward IV, or the nephew of Margaret of Burgundy, or the 'White Rose'.

The second answer to this question lies in the checks we made in terms of the authenticity of this document. All of the specialists at the Gelderland Archive looked at it and confirmed that it's absolutely of the right period: the writing, watermarks, paper, grammar and language are all correct. They signed an authenticating document for us confirming their opinion. We also gave it to independent specialists for the TV documentary on Channel 4, including Dr Janina Ramirez and Dr Andrew Dunning, curator of medieval manuscripts at the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. We can say it's absolutely authentic, and that all of the discoveries in it are real.

How does the manuscript advance our understanding of what happened to Richard?

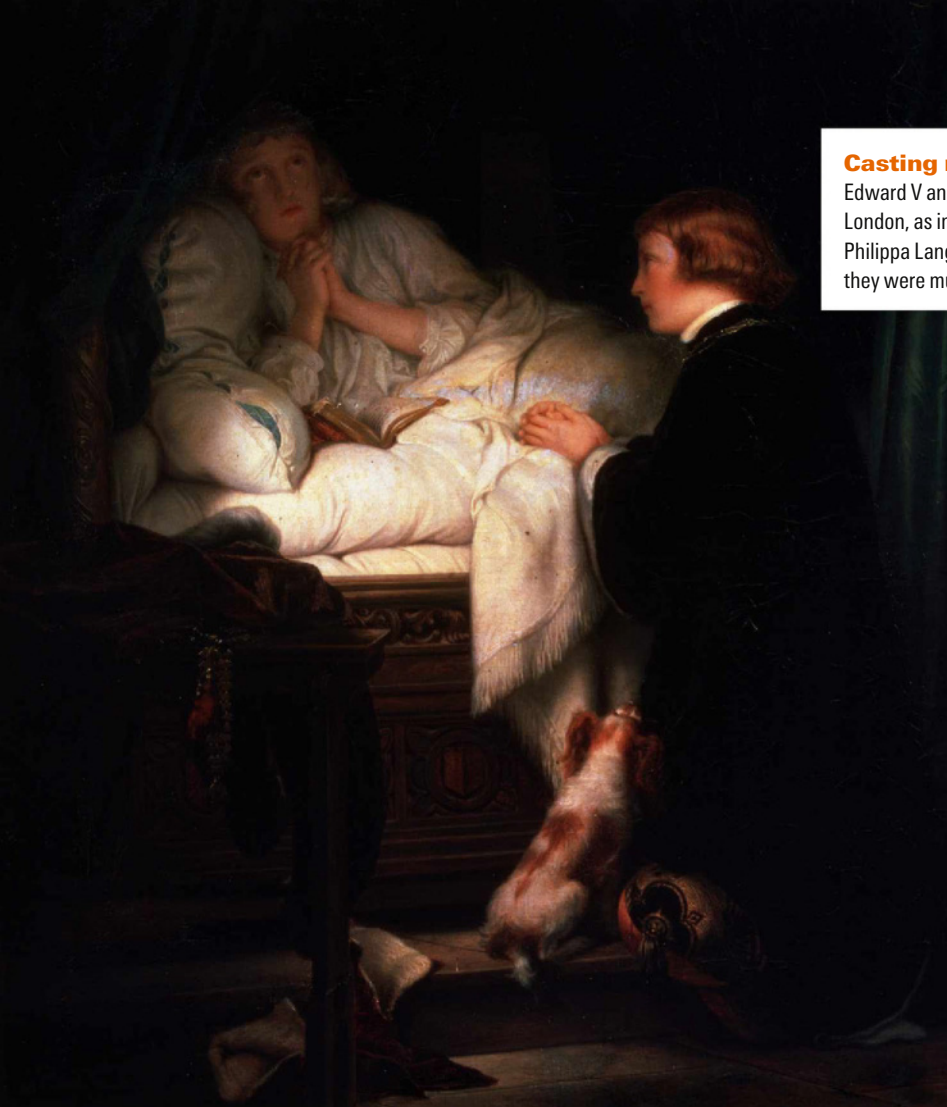
It's proof of life, and it gives us his story. It tells us that he was sent to safety on the continent for a number of years by John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, with two Ricardian Yorkist retainers to watch over and look after him. He was later given the name Perkin Warbeck by the Tudor government, and was said to be the son of a boatman, born at Tournai in France. That story is false.

We've uncovered further evidence, too. In the Saxon State Archive in Dresden, Germany, Nijman-Bliekendaal found a receipt for a



Royal return?

The boy known as Lambert Simnel, long believed a pretender, on a 17th-century playing card. Philippa Langley argues that he was actually Edward V



Casting new light?

Edward V and Richard, Duke of York, in the Tower of London, as imagined in an 1852 painting by Paul Delaroche. Philippa Langley believes there is no evidence to suggest they were murdered by Richard III or anyone else

anybody else? I could see no evidence to support that idea.

It seems there was an attempt to remove the boys from the Tower in July 1483 while Richard III was away touring the country – and it seems that Richard then moved the princes to secure locations.

What do you think is the most likely narrative for what happened to the boys that summer?

The older brother, Edward, was removed from the Tower of London on or by 11 August. He may have travelled with John Howard to Gipping in Suffolk, the home of Sir James Tyrrell, a servant of Richard III who was later said to have confessed to the princes' murder. Or he may have gone to the estate of Francis Lovell, another ally of Richard III, at Longdendale in Cheshire, or at some point to Barnard Castle, now in County Durham.

A key contemporary source is Niclas von Popplau, a Silesian knight who was at Richard III's court at the start of May 1484. He tells us that he had heard that the princes were being kept at Pontefract Castle. We also know, from a treason trial of Yorkist rebels in 1486, that King Edward V was expelled from his dominion and sent to the Channel Islands before the battle of Bosworth, but then with the death of Richard III, he eventually went to Ireland.

pledge of payment for 30,000 florins made to a leading member of the Burgundian court, Duke Albert of Saxony, a large sum of money, which Richard would repay upon becoming sovereign ruler of England. This document was signed by an individual who called himself Richard of England, and who was claiming the throne. It carries Richard's royal monogram and has a royal seal, perfectly intact, with the royal arms of England and a crown.

Then another find was made in the Austrian State Archive by Zoë Maula of the Dutch Research Group. It's a letter from Maximilian to Henry VII, mediating between the English king and Richard, Duke of York. He says to Henry that there are many signs that can't be counterfeited to confirm that this person is who he said he is. He mentions three birthmarks on his body: on the mouth, the eye and thigh.

So we found several documents in Europe that confirm who this person was, providing ample evidence. It's hugely compelling.

Assuming, then, that both princes survived and became known as Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, is there an argument that Richard III made a mistake in letting them survive? After all, they both went on to contest the throne

Yes – but, again, you have to go back and look at the situation in that moment. The princes were declared illegitimate by parliament and, as bastards, they had no claim to the throne.

A lot of historians in the past have said that Richard III took the throne illegally, so we aimed to discover if that was the case. We found a dozen evidences confirming that he was the legal king, which removes his motive to murder the sons of Edward IV. Killing children in those days was, as it is today, the most heinous of crimes. In those highly religious times, it was believed that God, hell, purgatory and the soul were real, so child murder was not something that anybody would have taken lightly. Could the boys have been murdered by

And what do you think happened to Richard?

He was put on a ship by John Howard and sailed to Boulogne-sur-Mer. He was taken to Paris, and stayed there for quite a while with his Ricardian retainers, Thomas and Henry Percy, who looked after him. He travelled around the Low Countries and northern France for the next 10 years with the Percy brothers. Then, following the battle of Stoke, at which the forces of Edward V were defeated, Richard sent Thomas Percy to his mother, Elizabeth Woodville, in England to make sure that she knew he was alive. He sent her messages and evidences to confirm that it was him.

Richard then went to Portugal with Henry Percy. Henry VII was by then looking for him, sending out spies to wherever Richard was. When Henry Percy died around 1490, Richard travelled to Ireland, where he was known. A new discovery tells us that he'd been there when he was about six, and was made Lieutenant of Ireland, so the leading earls there would have met him as a boy. It's clear that he was recognised on his return to Ireland as the younger son of Edward IV.

What do you hope to find in phase two of the project?

We know now, at the end of phase one, that the boys survived, but there are still key moments when we don't know what happened to them, and we don't know where they're buried. That is what we're now looking into during phase two. We'd really like to be able to tell the final part of their story and, one day, to honour the final resting places of these young men – or, potentially, men who died in old age. **11**



Delve deeper into the mystery

Listen to the extended interview with Philippa Langley on our podcast now: historyextra.com/princes-tower-pod



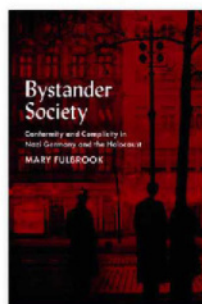


Forced labour Hitler Youth force Jews to clean a street in Vienna, 1938. A new book about the Holocaust explores the roles of indifference, ignorance and impotence

WWII

Enabling atrocities

CHRISTINE SCHMIDT is impressed by a study examining the extent to which the actions (and inactions) of German people enabled the Nazis' murderous campaign



Bystander Society: Conformity and Complicity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust
by Mary Fulbrook
Oxford University Press,
496 pages, £26.99

Mary Fulbrook's new book attempts to answer a persistent, pointed question: how complicit were Germans in the Holocaust? *Bystander Society* draws on a set

of fascinating first-person accounts held at Harvard University, collected for a 1940 competition inviting essays on the theme: 'My Life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933'.

Yielding some 263 autobiographical texts provided by about 230 individuals, the competition was judged by Harvard faculty members Gordon Allport, Sidney B Fay and Edward Hartshorne, who tried to gain a deeper understanding of what was happening in Nazi Germany during that pivotal period.

Most of the accounts submitted came from educated professionals but, as Fulbrook

notes, those with less-prominent backgrounds also submitted entries. These include essays written by Jewish men and women, but also those of 'mixed' Jewish and 'Aryan' descent, people in so-called 'mixed' marriages, and non-Jews who were supportive or critical of the Nazi regime. (A welcome intervention in Fulbrook's introduction to this new book is a critical discussion of the problematic use of Nazi terminology and reproduction of 'racial' concepts in history writing.)

Writing largely in exile, contributors represent a cross-section of German society in

// Germany was shaped into a 'bystander society' through a process of compliance, radicalisation, ignorance and indifference //

1940: observers of the regime's increasingly radical policies and its impact on individual lives. In short, though these accounts – and Fulbrook's book as a whole – do not offer a comprehensive history of Nazi Germany or the Holocaust, they do provide a tantalising window onto developing conformity and complicity that propelled events forward, well before public knowledge of the death camps overshadowed how German society was actively shaped into a 'bystander society' through an interactive process of compliance, radicalisation, ignorance and indifference.

Fulbrook argues that, although elites who gained control over structures of repression and those who facilitated mass murder were still the most directly culpable for genocide, members of wider German society were "integrally involved in an unfolding process within a more all-encompassing system of violence".

Her new study provides a useful complication of the notion of 'bystander' – one of three somewhat facile categories used to distinguish the groups of people who did not murder or who did not fall victim to the policies of the Nazis and their allies or, as Fulbrook describes them, "the muddled middle". She complicates the idea of what a 'bystander' was, and tries to understand the shifts in individual behaviour over time.

Taking a closer look at the choices individuals made, and the reasons for their shifting compliance and indifference, provides deeper insights into how systemic and collective violence was maintained in Nazi Germany.

Complementing the work of Peter Fritzsche, Thomas Kühne and Robert Gellately, Fulbrook shows how the accounts effectively demonstrate how millions of 'non-Aryan' Germans absorbed a sense of racialised identity, which helped foster either justification for, or wilful ignorance of, Nazi policy, and often led to active support, even if in rare cases people alleviated their unease or guilt by expressing sympathy for individual persecutees. As Fulbrook explains, even if

there were small and individual acts of opposition, the overall conformity of the German population "ultimately served to further the Nazi project".

Fulbrook's book provides a nuanced – albeit German-centric – analysis of the changing circumstances and opportunities for manoeuvre for individuals who did not act in isolation, historicising compliance as part of an explanation for how the Holocaust could have happened.

Her book can be read usefully alongside other recent contributions to the field that emphasise the European-wide nature of the crimes of the Nazis and the initiative of their collaborators. These include Dan Stone's *The Holocaust: An Unfinished History* (Pelican, 2023) and scholarship that examines antisemitism and wide complicity in other regions, such as Diana Dumitru's *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, 2016).

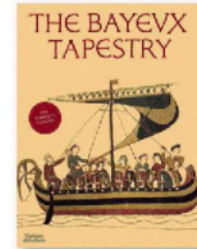
Fulbrook's poignant conclusion, applicable not only to Germany during the Holocaust, is that "indifference, ignorance, and impotence are socially produced: we can learn to not care, to turn away and ignore the fates of others, to feel powerless in face of overwhelming force or impossible constraints; and we can acquire and internalize the discourses that make us feel all right about what we are doing or failing to do, the worldviews that seem to justify moral compromises to ourselves and others." Indeed, Fulbrook's words have pointed resonance today. **I**

Christine Schmidt is deputy director and head of research at the Wiener Holocaust Library, London. Her work focuses on postwar archives and the search for those missing after the Holocaust



Observing oppression Jewish businessmen in 1930s Leipzig are forced to carry signs exhorting onlookers "Don't buy from Jews – buy in German shops"

David Musgrove on a spectacular detailed reproduction of the Bayeux Tapestry



The Bayeux Tapestry: The Complete Tapestry in Colour by David M Wilson (Thames and Hudson, 1985)

1066 is surely the most famous year in English – maybe British – history. That's partly because we are blessed with an amazing pictorial source to bring to life that era-defining episode, the battle of Hastings: the Bayeux Tapestry.

If you want to really get to grips with the 68-metre-long embroidery, go to Bayeux. Failing that, this book is a great alternative. It's probably too large to fit on your bookshelves, but that's why it's so good. Its oversized pages feature a complete colour reproduction of the tapestry, prefaced by a short, clear and authoritative introduction by David M Wilson, one-time director of the British Museum. It also includes a short scene-by-scene commentary.

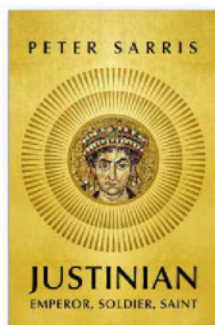
This is the sort of book that you can look at for hours. It follows a long tradition of scholars and artists attempting the difficult challenge of replicating the 11th-century masterpiece – no easy feat, given its size, medium and fragility. In the early 18th century, a French monk and antiquarian published a series of engravings. Then, in the 19th century, Charles Stothard was sent to Bayeux by the Society of Antiquaries to make drawings (he also made casts and cut fragments from it). Next, a full photographic copy was made. Around 1885, the 'Ladies of Leek' – members of the Leek Embroidery Society in Staffordshire – completed a full-length replica. And in the past few years, Bayeux Museum has created an amazing digital reproduction that is also worth a look. But if you're searching for a print version to cherish, this book provides it. **II**

David Musgrove is content director of BBC History Magazine and co-author of *The Story of the Bayeux Tapestry* (Thames & Hudson, 2021)

MEDIEVAL

Imperial plight

PETER HEATHER is swept along by a vibrant new biography of the eastern Roman emperor Justinian, whose reign was marked by conquest, conflict and, ultimately, deadly plague



Justinian: Emperor, Soldier, Saint
by Peter Sarris
Basic Books, 544 pages, £30

Some readers will be familiar with Justinian – or at least with the unforgettable caricatures sketched by the sixth-century histori-

an Procopius of the eastern Roman emperor, his wife and his astonishing victories. With this new book, though, Peter Sarris triumphantly delivers a highly intelligent and up-to-date account of a tumultuous reign. He covers Justinian's rise from nowhere, his scandalous marriage, his conquests in north Africa, Italy and Spain. And he explores the periodic political resistance that punctuated Justinian's reign – one outbreak in Constantinople killed 20,000 and burned out the city centre – and his occasionally disastrous wars against Persia.

Sarris's writing is expertly crafted, a well-judged blend of overview and detail. I particularly enjoyed glimpses of personal experience worked into the narrative: the author's visits to the site of Justiniana Prima, now in southern Serbia; to the surviving mosaics of the imperial palace in Istanbul; and to the ancient map of the Holy Land surviving in the remains of a Byzantine church in Madaba, Jordan.

The book's chief contribution, though, lies in deep dives into less familiar territory. Sarris is uniquely qualified here, having spent his career immersed in less-trawled blocks of evidence: in caches of Egyptian papyri and the massive collection of new laws (Novels) issued by Justinian. From these materials, Sarris conjures a vivid account of the emperor's policies at work in the provinces, and a much fuller picture of his personality. For the first time, we glimpse a more-rounded Justinian – driven to distraction by administrative corruption, and concerned throughout with details of theology – who begins to emerge from the confines of Procopian hostility.

The book also features Sarris's personal Justinian in another important sense. Mostly written during the isolation of the Covid-19



Ancient epidemic People afflicted by bubonic plague, depicted in a late 15th-century Dutch painting. The extent to which this catastrophe changed the eastern Roman empire remains up for debate

// We glimpse a Justinian driven to distraction by administrative corruption, and concerned throughout with details of theology //

pandemic, at its heart lies another famous epidemic: the Justinianic (bubonic) plague of the 540s. This enables Sarris to share with his readers more than they will find elsewhere. His account of the plague, and of the partial veiling of the sun that preceded it, is thoroughly informed by a recent rush of data and analysis. For Sarris, that plague was no isolated catastrophe, but prompted an economic downturn that made it increasingly difficult to maintain the armies necessary to keep the empire together in Justinian's later years and beyond.

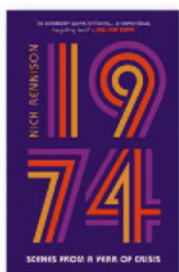
This is an important argument, but not the only way to approach the problematic legacies of Justinian's reign. My only criticism of the book is levelled at the part of the story that, I suspect, interests Sarris the least: the military history surrounding the wars of conquest. His book lacks a real sense of how much these wars stretched the empire: the disastrous losses to Persia of 540/41, stemming from the commitment of so many elite troops to Italy; and the lengthy insurgencies in Africa and Italy that flourished when those formations reverted east, leaving insufficient cash to pay the western garrisons left behind.

Not every epidemic kills like the Black Death, bringing structural change in its wake, and current evidence is inconclusive that the Justinianic plague did so. An alternative possibility is that the emperor's really toxic legacy wasn't bacterial but a new emphasis on expensive expansionary campaigning as the path to imperial greatness. **H**

Peter Heather is professor of medieval history at King's College London. His latest book is *Christendom: The Triumph of a Religion* (Penguin, 2022)

SOCIAL

Hot date



1974: Scenes from a Year of Crisis
by Nick Rennison
Oldcastle Books,
256 pages,
£14.99

It's something of a trite truism that historians love dates; even so, singling out 1974 as a pivotal year in history might raise a few eyebrows. Yet in his latest book, Nick Rennison makes an enjoyable and often wry case for that year being a key moment of transition. His approach is eclectic, taking in death, sport, technology, political turmoil and cultural change. As a result, the overall effect can be somewhat dissonant – but then, one imagines, so was living through these events.

Like 1974 itself – for those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, at least – the book begins auspiciously, with an extra public holiday on New Year's Day. This was arguably one of the high points of the year for residents of those three nations (Scotland, in its wisdom, introduced a public holiday on 1 January in 1871), because 1974 was also the year of electricity restrictions, bombings and two general elections held less than eight months apart.



Dim view Office staff work by candle- and lamplight in early 1974, when electricity use by businesses was restricted

Rennison doesn't ignore events outside the UK. We are reminded that 179 people died in a fire in a multi-storey building in São Paulo, Brazil in February. In March, the Volkswagen Golf was launched in West Germany, while in April a close aide to that country's chancellor was arrested as a spy. In Italy, the right to divorce was retained as a result of a referendum in May. And the book closes with an account of the devastating cyclone that hit Darwin, Australia in December.

Readers could be forgiven for reflecting upon how little has changed since then, with

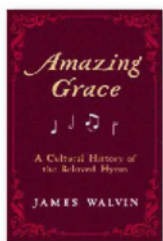
the safety of high-rise buildings, the pace of technological change, fears of espionage, environmental threats and the fight for hard-won rights still prominent in the public agenda.

This is not the book to read to appraise the impact of these events, but it does serve as a reminder of the messiness of history – and just how much can happen in 12 months. **H**

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Sarah Crook, senior lecturer in modern history at Swansea University

CULTURAL

Unchained melody



Amazing Grace: A Cultural History of the Beloved Hymn
by James Walvin
University of California Press,
216 pages, £16.99

When President Obama sang 'Amazing Grace' at the funeral service for the victims of the racist Charleston church shooting in 2015, it was, writes James Walvin, "one of the most electrifying moments in modern presidential history: a moment of brilliant and calculated audacity". It was also a remarkable episode in the history of a "simple Christian hymn" that travelled from a peaceful corner of rural

England in the 18th century to become a global anthem for humankind, healing and hope. It's been recorded thousands of times, with versions by Judy Collins and Aretha Franklin selling in their millions, while the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards' release became one of the bestselling instrumental singles of all time in Britain.

In this fascinating, concise and at times moving cultural history, Walvin deftly traces the evolution of 'Amazing Grace' against an ever-changing backdrop of technological and social change across the past 250 years. It's a sweeping tale, with each twist and turn underpinned by historical context.

Walvin begins with the troubling paradox at the heart of 'Amazing Grace'. This hymn, later taken to the hearts of enslaved black people in North America for its words that powerfully expressed their fears and hopes, was penned by a British preacher, John Newton, who had himself been the captain

of a slave ship, with all the shame and brutality that entailed.

Newton's words were first sung on New Year's Day in 1773 in Olney, Buckinghamshire, but not to the tune we know today. It then jumped across the Atlantic, where 'Amazing Grace' began appearing in newly popular hymn books, and the music evolved into its current form. Although the melody's exact authorship remains unclear, in 1835 it was published as the tune 'New Britain' by one William Walker (also known as 'Singing Billy'), accompanying Newton's words. The modern hymn was born, its popularity exploded, and it became beloved of Americans from all corners of society.

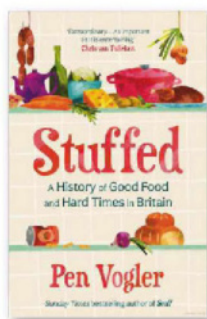
Today, thanks to 20th-century inventions including radio, recording and streaming, it's sung and played around the world. **H**

.....
Rebecca Franks, music writer and section editor on *BBC History Magazine*

SOCIAL

Oral history

ANNIE GRAY is entertained by a look at plenty and poverty in the kitchens of Britain through the ages



Stuffed: A History of Good Food and Hard Times in Britain
by Pen Vogler
Atlantic, 464 pages, £22

Another clever title from the author of *Scoff* (2020), *Stuffed* is about being replete with food and devoid

of it – a history of feast and famine in Britain throughout history.

It's an ambitious book, leaping merrily from the Neolithic to the modern day, and covering such varied topics as Anglo-Saxon lords allocating resources to their tenants, Tudor smallholders practising pannage (pasturing pigs in woodland), Georgian pie-makers packing pastry parcels, and 1970s housewives struggling to love supermarkets. The breadth of research is impressive (though the bibliography curiously sparse), and it is a more serious book than Vogler's previous work. It is also less reliant on literary sources, and more urgent and explicit in linking modern themes and concerns to those of the past. Indeed, some of the best parts see Vogler drawing comparisons between the 13th-century Assize of Bread and Ale (regulating quantity) and modern shrinkflation, or between medieval fish ponds and show-off American-style fridges. Her prose is very readable, and it is packed full of facts.

The structure is, however, an issue, preventing a good book from being a great one. It's divided into sections, some of which are historical (Before the enclosures), others thematic (Children and families, Crises). Within these are short chapters nominally focusing on specific foods: beans, goose, sugar, pumpkin pie, tea. Vogler is clear that she's not covering the entire history of each food, but exploring specific items as ways into a wider topic. Sometimes this really works: strawberries, oatmeal, broth, wine and ale, mustard and pickles are all really good. Elsewhere, we don't get to the food until near a chapter's end – worts, for example – and focus is lacking. The chapter on potatoes and jam is more properly about allotments; it's excellent, but I expected to read about Ireland in the



Stock answers A shopper browses the newly opened Sainsbury's supermarket in Sutton, 1970

// The author draws comparisons between the 13th-century Assize of Bread and Ale and modern shrinkflation //

1840s. Some chapters never seem to get to a point at all.

This is a book to dip into rather than to read straight through. It has plenty of wow moments, including a memorable description of the cooking conditions at Scutari Barracks in 1855, when French chef Alexis Soyer arrived to revolutionise British armed forces catering during the Crimean War. A wry

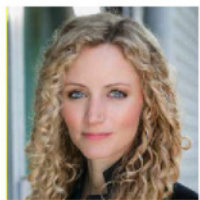
sense of humour keeps it light, widening the appeal beyond food-history devotees, and modernised recipes are cleverly used to illustrate Vogler's points.

The author makes some factual errors – puff pastry was in use by the 1590s, not the 1650s, and Kellogg's Corn Flakes were developed at the start of the 20th century, not the 19th – and has a slightly irritating habit of repeating myths. Stylistically, I think she can include herself within the category of 'historians', rather than citing them like a species apart. However, despite the structural problems, her book offers a fun read and an illuminating look at food inequality – and responsibility – in the past. It's also an explicit invitation to reflect on the present through that lens. I hope a copy ends up in the House of Commons library. **U**

Annie Gray is a food historian. Her books include *At Christmas We Feast: Festive Food Through the Ages* (Profile, 2021)

NEW PRIZE FOR WOMEN'S NON-FICTION

"There is still a clear, continuing inequality between female and male writers of non-fiction"



SUZANNAH LIPSCOMB, chair of the judging panel for the new Women's Prize for Non-Fiction, explains why it marks an important step in challenging the 'authority gap'

How did the new prize come about?

In February 2023, the Women's Prize Trust announced its intention to create this new annual book award. It's almost 30 years since the Women's Prize for Fiction was launched, and it had long been the trust's goal to establish a sister prize to amplify exceptional narrative non-fiction writing by women. There also was a sense of the zeitgeist. For some time, I've also advocated for a non-fiction prize for women. The new award was made possible by funding from the Charlotte Aitken Trust [which supports literature, writing and reading], Findmypast [a UK-based family tree company] and an anonymous donor.

Why is such an award important today?

There is still a clear, continuing inequality between female and male writers of non-fiction. Research by the Women's Prize Trust shows that books by women are less likely to be reviewed, less likely to appear in 'Best Books of the Year' round-ups, less likely to be shortlisted or win non-fiction prizes, and more likely to receive a lower advance. I don't think this is because books by women aren't as good as men's. It's about perceptions of authority.

Do you think there's a gendered divide between readers of fiction and non-fiction that needs to be tackled?

Journalist Mary Ann Sieghart found that men are four times more likely to read a novel written by a man than one by a woman. We don't currently have the stats for non-fiction – we're working on it – but I suspect a similar gender split is true.

You've highlighted the fact that readers tend to buy more history books by men than by women. Why is that?

It's the 'authority gap', a concept coined by Sieghart. Women are, statistics show, less likely than men to be taken seriously,



Championing female voices The judging panel comprises (from left to right): biographer Anne Sebba, novelist Kamila Shamsie, historian Suzannah Lipscomb, academic Nicola Rollock and fair fashion campaigner Venetia La Manna

especially by men. It's the lingering perception that men have authority and expertise, and women do not. They do.

As a historian, have you encountered differences in the ways male and female authors are regarded, and the subjects they're expected to write about?

Things have changed in academic circles but there is still a way to go before female historians are seen as possessing the same level of authority as men within the public sphere. To some extent, I think women are expected to write about women, family and society, men about war and 'big ideas'. Some of this is about women redressing the

balance, sharing perspectives on the past, but some is just misplaced categorisation.

What impact would you like the new award to have?

To bring attention to the talented and often overlooked female writers creating groundbreaking non-fiction, and to show that authority and expertise are qualities that women possess in spades. **H**

Suzannah Lipscomb is chairing the inaugural Women's Prize for Non-Fiction 2024. The longlist will be announced on 15 February, the shortlist on 27 March and the winner on 13 June. For more details, visit womensprize.com

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EXHIBITION

Spinning yarns

This scarf produced in London during the Second World War urges the public to sort and salvage rubber, paper, metal and other materials considered valuable to the war effort

How much political heft does a tea towel wield? More than you might think – at least, that's the contention of an exhibition about the propaganda power of textiles. Turning the spotlight on creators and designers who have woven and printed messages on and into furnishings, fabrics and fashions, curator and design historian Amber Butchart reveals how domestic settings are not immune from propaganda more often associated with public art and monumental sculpture.

From a design marking the storming of the Bastille in 1789 to a Second World War 'Salvage Your Rubber' scarf (above) and a 'Get Brexit Done' tea towel, this display weaves a rich historical tapestry.

The Fabric of Democracy: Propaganda Textiles from the French Revolution to Brexit

Fashion & Textile Museum, London /
Until 3 March / fashiontextilemuseum.org

RADIO

Dramatic turn

In 1939, actor and director Val Gielgud – brother of renowned thespian Sir John, and then head of productions at BBC Radio – had a bright idea. In a time of war, he reasoned, an in-house company of actors might prove a useful resource. Thus was born Auntie's Radio Drama Company (RDC).

On the outbreak of hostilities, Gielgud and assorted actors were evacuated to rural Worcestershire. Now Hannah Khalil's new drama, produced to celebrate a century of radio plays at the BBC and performed by past and present members of the RDC, imagines what might have happened next. Specifically, just how do you record a play in the draughty stables of a Victorian stately home?

A Wireless War

BBC Sounds / Available from Monday 18 December



The BBC Radio Drama Company, created by Val Gielgud (left) in 1939, features in a new radio play about a wartime production

The musical Kanneh-Mason clan heads to the Austrian Alps near Salzburg to ensure peak performances for a new BBC Two show

TV

Musical families

The real-life story of the von Trapps, who provided the inspiration for *The Sound of Music*, is remarkable. Having escaped Austria after the Nazis annexed the country in 1938, the family made a new life in the US, where they performed as a singing group until 1957.

Now the tale is revived by the equally musical Kanneh-Mason family – parents Kadie and Stuart, and their seven talented children – as they head to Salzburg and other film locations to walk in the footsteps of the von Trapps. Expect performances of such evergreen classics as 'Climb Every Mountain', 'My Favourite Things', 'Do-Re-Mi' and 'Edelweiss'.

The Hills Are Alive with the Kanneh-Masons

BBC Two / December





Driver Abdul Ghani, painted by Henry Lamb in 1941. A new display in Glasgow explores the role of south Asians in Scottish life during the Second World War

EXHIBITION

Asian impact

Millions of soldiers in the British Indian Army (BIA) fought for the Allies during the Second World War. Scotland has a particularly strong bond with the BIA, its Force K6 contingent having been stationed here for training. Now a new display at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum tells the story of Glasgow's south Asian population which, though small, had a palpable impact on the city.

There were the workers who supported the war effort in munitions factories, members of the community who joined the Red Cross, and merchant seamen who took to the dangerous seas to transport food, supplies and people around the world. Images and artefacts, including loans and family photographs from local people, explore an enduring legacy.

GlaswegAsians: the South Asian Contribution during World War II

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow / Until 30 April / glasgowlife.org.uk

"They found dozens of tiny gems with engraved figures of Roman gods and goddesses on them"



PROFESSOR ALICE ROBERTS (left) tells us about her returning series that charts the discoveries made over a year in British archaeology

How is the latest series of *Digging for Britain* arranged?

The series includes six programmes, each focusing on a geographic area. This year we have sites spanning a huge depth of time: from 300,000-year-old Palaeolithic hand-axes to Second World War defences.

What were the highlights for you?

Three discoveries really stood out for me. One was the unearthing of an unknown bathhouse in Carlisle. Archaeologists from Wardell Armstrong dug down through medieval layers and came to monumental masonry that was clearly Roman. Carlisle was, of course, an important Roman town, at the western end of Hadrian's Wall.

But it was their smaller finds that really blew me away. The drains of the bathhouse were perfectly preserved. The archaeologists carefully sieved the sediment inside them and found dozens of tiny gems with engraved figures of Roman gods and goddesses on them. These were from signet rings. In the hot and steamy atmosphere of the baths, they had dropped out and been washed down the drains. I could imagine rich Romans emerging, after a good bathe and gossip, only to find that they'd lost their favourite gemstones!

And how about the other discoveries?

Another highlight was the discovery of a mysterious bronze dodecahedron found during excavations by the Norton Disney History and Archaeology Group. There are 32 of these strange objects already known from Britain, but this one was particularly well preserved. These cast bronze artefacts have different-sized holes in each of their 12 sides. Nobody knows what they were used for. I'm hoping one of our viewers might be able to come up with the answer!

My other stand-out discovery from this year's digs was a fifth-century date for a mosaic at Chedworth Roman Villa, from

a National Trust investigation run by Martin Papworth. The villa was still being added to in the fifth century, after the Roman army had withdrawn from Britain. We have this assumption that villas fell into disuse very quickly after AD 410. At Chedworth, that clearly wasn't the case.

When we last spoke about *Digging for Britain*, there was a sense of archaeology being a rapidly developing field. Is that still the case?

I've noticed there are a lot more digital recording and aerial drone surveys happening now. Many of the archaeologists we've worked with have mapped their sites in great detail using techniques such as photogrammetry and multispectral imaging. I'm particularly interested in the way that archaeogenomics [the study of ancient DNA] is transforming how we unlock information from skeletal remains. I have written a trilogy of books on burial archaeology and ancient DNA, with the latest, *Crypt*, out in February. **B**

Digging for Britain will be on BBC Two in January. Alice Roberts will be on tour in February and March: alice-roberts.co.uk



Alice Roberts with one of the finds from Carlisle's Roman bathhouse



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RECIPE

Sugar-free Tudor biscuits

ELEANOR BARNETT bakes a batch of sweet morsels – made with some surprisingly earthy ingredients

What comes to mind when you think of Tudor food? Perhaps you imagine a great feast at which ostentatious pies were served with stuffed and gilded swans on top. After mountains of meat, the wealthy would banquet on luxurious biscuits, candied fruits and elaborate sugar sculptures. Henry VIII's leading statesman Thomas Wolsey even created an entire sugar chessboard for such an occasion, complete with moving sugar pieces.

But the Tudor period also experienced great want. Poor harvests were common, landowners closed off pasture to peasants, and the growing population put pressure on dwindling food supplies.

In the 1590s, a huge rise in the cost of grain caused hunger and sparked riots. To help people through the shortages, in 1596 the inventor and agricultural writer Sir Hugh Platt published a special recipe book, *Sundrie New and Artificiall Remedies Against Famine*. One recipe for "sweete and delicate cakes made without spice, or sugar" caught my eye, not least because we are always on the lookout for non-sugary versions of our favourite treats today.

In Platt's recipe, dried and beaten parsnip replaces sugar and imported spices such as cinnamon, ginger and nutmeg, which were among the most expensive



A peasant at work in a 16th-century engraving. Poor harvests and hunger were rife in the Tudor period



With sugar and spices prohibitively expensive in 16th-century England, one recipe writer used parsnips instead

ingredients of the era. Although parsnip might at first seem an odd addition, we are accustomed to root vegetables in our desserts, carrot cake being a particular favourite.

In times of scarcity, creative cooks have often come up with thrifty ways of substituting ingredients and using up available foods. Root vegetables are cheap, naturally sweet and easy to grow. During the shortages of the Second World War, the British Ministry of Food similarly recommended using carrots to sweeten Christmas pudding.

Carrots or turnips work as well as parsnips, according to Platt, who experimented with different versions of the basic recipe. "I haue eaten of these cakes diuers times in mine owne house," he wrote, promising that "you shal find them to tast very daintily."

Platt's instructions are very limited: he instructs readers to add parsnip to flour at a ratio of one to two, and to "make some cakes thereof". It could be that Platt intended his parsnip cake to be a type of ship's biscuit. Such biscuits were ordinarily made of flour and water, not using anything that might spoil so that they would remain edible during long sea voyages – but they were also, therefore, lacking in flavour.

Following Platt's policy of substitution, I've added butter and a dash of milk to the flour and parsnip to make something that resembles shortbread.

Though parsnip does not fully provide the sweetness of sugar that we're used to, the biscuits do go down well with an (anachronistic) cup of tea. You could also experiment by adding currants for extra sweetness, using carrots in place of parsnips, or making a risen bread/cake mixture instead.

Serves: 5–7 (makes about 15 biscuits)

Difficulty: 2/10

Time taken: 5 hours

INGREDIENTS

3 parsnips
140g plain flour
100g salted butter, cut into small cubes
1 tbsp milk

METHOD

1. Wash and peel the parsnips. Cut or grate them into thin slices and place on a baking tray.
2. Heat your oven to 70°C (fan) or its lowest setting, put the parsnips on the tray, and dry for at least 4 hours.
3. Blend the dried parsnips to a fine powder in a blender or food processor.
4. Combine the flour, powdered parsnip and butter with your fingers to make a dough. Add 1 tbsp of milk to pull the dough together.
5. On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough to about ½cm thick. Cut into shapes of your choosing.
6. Chill the dough in the fridge for 20 minutes.
7. Preheat oven to 150°C (fan) / gas mark 2. Bake the biscuits for 15–20 minutes.

Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her new book, *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Head of Zeus), is out in 2024



TV

Ghostly Gothic

Arthur Conan Doyle's work ethic was formidable. In 1892, the same year in which *The Strand Magazine* published seven new Sherlock Holmes stories, *Lot No. 249* made its public bow. This Gothic tale riffing off Egyptomania – the late 19th-century craze for all things pharaoh – has long been a favourite story of actor and writer Mark Gatiss. It is, he says, "a ripping yarn packed with ghostly scares and who-knows-what lurking in the

Victorian closet" – and he's now adapted it for television as a Christmas ghost story.

It follows on from *Killing Sherlock: Lucy Worsley on the Case of Conan Doyle* (BBC iPlayer), in which the writer and historian reflects on Conan Doyle's love-hate relationship with his most famous creation.

A Ghost Story for Christmas: Lot No. 249

BBC Two / December

In BBC Two's adaptation of *Lot No. 249*, Colin Ryan, Kit Harington and Freddie Fox encounter an Egyptian mummy

EXHIBITION

Ceramic chronicles

As a decorative art, pottery can seem both trifling and transient, works being susceptible to physical damage and to the whims of changing fashions. Yet, as the extensive and diverse collection of one Victorian Brighton brewer shows, it can also reveal fascinating insights into popular culture as well as key characters and episodes from history.

Henry Willett's ceramic treasures, now displayed at the V&A, include such gems as a c1812 flask in the shape of a bear clasping Napoleon, and door handles depicting pioneering 18th-century balloon flights. The collection also includes curious, bird-based caricatures drawing on the controversial Tichborne case that captivated English society in the 1860s, involving the claim of a purported lost heir to a baronetcy.

Henry Willett's Collection of Popular Pottery

V&A South Kensington, London /
Until 29 September / vam.ac.uk

Charlie Chaplin visits London in 1930. The following decade, he was among those blacklisted in the US for alleged communist leanings



RADIO

Red scare

In later life, Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977) – at his peak, the world's biggest movie star – found himself exiled from Hollywood. How did this extraordinary reversal of fortunes occur? The story of the actor who was among the highest-profile victims of the blacklist era opens a new 10-part series narrated by his granddaughter, Oona Chaplin (*Game of Thrones*).

The series goes on to explore how the FBI targeted Tinseltown in a prelude to the

post-Second World War US witch-hunts against alleged communists. It also charts the experiences of figures such as writer Dalton Trumbo (1905–76), who couldn't collect his Academy Awards for *Roman Holiday* (1953) and *The Brave One* (1956) while he was blacklisted.

Hollywood Exiles

BBC World Service & BBC Sounds /
Monday 22 January



This puzzle jug commemorating an assassination attempt against George III is among the ceramic gems casting 19th-century culture in a new light

TV

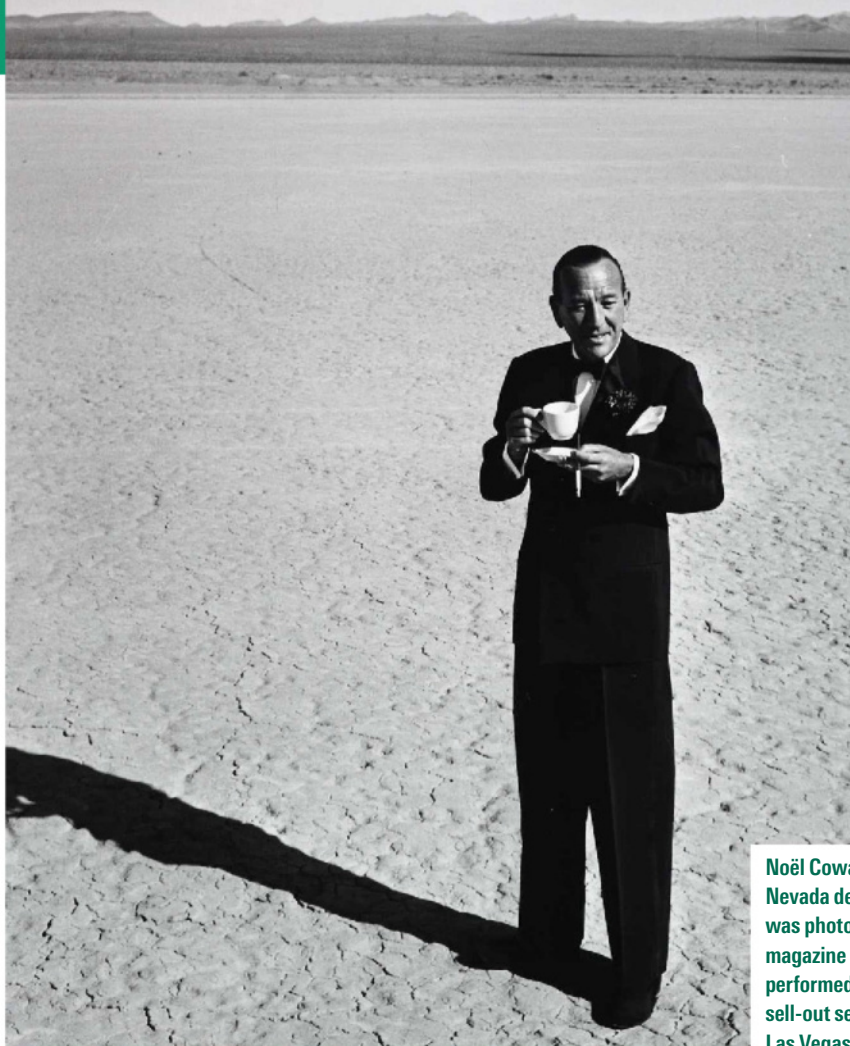
Master mind

For all his surface polish, Noël Coward (1899–1973) came from a modest background. The son of a piano salesman, he left school when he was just nine years old. Despite his lowly origins, by the time he was 30 the man who became known as 'The Master' for his sheer creativity had become the highest-paid writer in the world. "I was trained when I was very young as a show-off and I've continued triumphantly until this moment," he once noted of his glittering career.

Narrated by Alan Cumming, with Rupert Everett providing the voice of Coward, *Mad About the Boy* is a one-off Arena documentary that charts the extraordinary life of one of the foremost British creative figures of the 20th century.

Mad about the Boy: The Noël Coward Story

BBC Two / December



Noël Coward in the Nevada desert, where he was photographed for *Life* magazine in 1955. He performed a lucrative sell-out season in Las Vegas that year



Penelope Wilton stars as Lavinia Pinkerton and David Jonsson as police officer Luke Fitzwilliam in the new BBC One adaptation of Agatha Christie's *Murder Is Easy*

TV

Dastardly deeds

Trains often signal trouble down the line in Agatha Christie's novels. That's certainly the case in *Murder Is Easy* (1939), which begins with a police officer, Luke Fitzwilliam, meeting Lavinia Pinkerton on a journey to London. Pinkerton is convinced that there's a killer at large in the village of Wychwood under Ashe – a conviction Fitzwilliam begins to share in earnest when his new acquaintance, who is on her way to Scotland Yard, is found dead.

Set in 1954, a new BBC One adaptation makes perfect Christmas viewing. David Jonsson (*Rye Lane*) stars as Fitzwilliam, while Penelope Wilton (*Downton Abbey*) plays Pinkerton. A strong supporting class of familiar faces includes Douglas Henshall, Mark Bonnar and Tamzin Outhwaite. **H**

Agatha Christie's *Murder Is Easy*
BBC One / December

GETTY IMAGES

THREE HISTORY EXTRA PODCASTS ON MEDIEVAL LIFE



The travel bug

Even in the absence of a medieval travel agent, many people journeyed in the Middle Ages – but what reasons did they have for deciding to hit the road or the high seas, and what were

their experiences once they'd set out? In this episode, David Musgrove spoke to **Anthony Bale** to explore the reality of travel in the Middle Ages, from the costs of such trips to the dangers that people might face on the open road.

historyextra.com/medieval-travel-pod



Growing up medieval

We might have a mental image of childhood in the Middle Ages as being a dangerous and short period before an equally tough adulthood – but how

accurate is this view? In an 'Everything You Wanted to Know' episode, **Emily Joan Ward** explored medieval childhood. Speaking to David Musgrove, she discussed topics including education, children at work and what they did for fun.

historyextra.com/medieval-childhood-pod

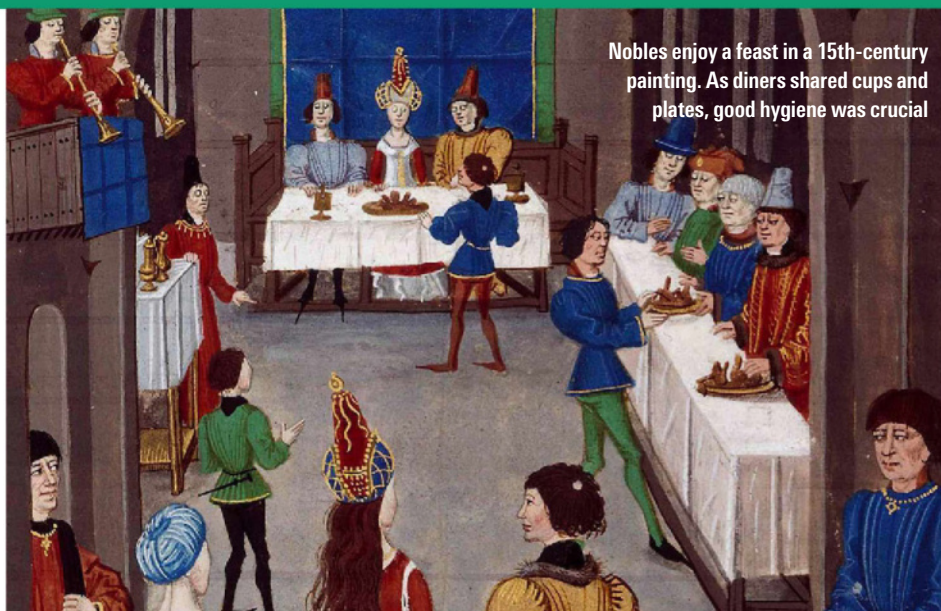


Between the sheets

How do medieval attitudes to sex compare with our 21st-century views? In this episode from the archives, historian Katherine Harvey spoke to Elinor Evans

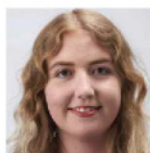
about the sex lives of ordinary people in the Middle Ages – from how sexuality was governed by ideas about sin, to the 'love magic' that was thought to trick people into bed.

historyextra.com/medieval-sex-pod



Nobles enjoy a feast in a 15th-century painting. As diners shared cups and plates, good hygiene was crucial

Medieval manners



Is it ever polite to wipe your mouth with a tablecloth? Acting podcast editor **RHIANNON DAVIES** explores the vagaries of social etiquette in the Middle Ages

While I was growing up, "keep your elbows off the table" was a common refrain at dinner time. But, as I learned in our recent podcast episode with medieval historian and author Danièle Cybulskie, such reprimands have a long history – harking all the way back to the Middle Ages.

In the medieval period, manners "were almost more important than they are today", explained Cybulskie. They were particularly prized by social climbers, because a firm grasp of etiquette was a way of standing out from the crowd: "It showed you were sophisticated and educated, and ready to hang out with the most important people of the day."

But what would have ingratiated you with a medieval host, and what kinds of social faux pas would have ensured that you were never invited back? According to Cybulskie, practising good hygiene was key, particularly when it came to the dinner table. In this era, dining was a much more intimate experience than it is today. When sharing a meal with a dining partner, you would also be sharing cups and plates.

"Don't blow your nose at the table, or wipe your face on the tablecloth," Cybulskie advised. "Instead, you should wipe your face with a napkin before taking a sip

of wine [from a shared cup], so you don't leave an oil slick for your partner."

As well as listing some behaviour to avoid, Cybulskie shared tips on how to be an attentive dining partner. "You would want to give the best portions of food to your partner at the table," she said, "and make sure they were comfortable and well taken care of."

Such social codes were set out in handbooks at the time. One of these, *The Book of the Civilised Man*, written in the early 14th century, was aimed at boys and young men – and, with advice tailored to this audience, warned its young readers against "making bodily function jokes at the table".

Social conventions extended beyond the dining hall. When visiting someone's house, for instance, it was considered de rigueur to wash your hands on arrival, so that you didn't bring dirt or grime inside. Though this is one custom that chimes with us in the 21st century, others feel decidedly medieval: one book implored readers "to make sure you get down from your horse before entering someone's house".



Listen now

You can hear this episode at historyextra.com/medieval-manners-pod



Shaped by the sea

A grand home built during the Tudor era burgeoned to become a vital strategic stronghold guarding Plymouth Sound. **SIÂN REES** roams a sprawling waterside estate at the easternmost edge of Cornwall

Mount Edgcumbe, like Venice, is best approached from the sea – though in this case you'll board the Cremyll Ferry (foot passengers only) from Plymouth, rather than a cruise ship. An eight-minute journey on the *Edgcumbe Belle* whisks visitors from the jerry at Admiral's Hard in Stonehouse to the single street and one pub that constitute the Cornish hamlet of Cremyll. Alight from the small vessel, and the 350-hectare grounds of Mount Edgcumbe stretch out before you.

The house, described by Samuel Pepys as "a most beautiful place as ever was seen", was built by Sir Richard Edgcumbe in the mid-16th century, his father having acquired this tranche of land on the Rame Peninsula through a canny marriage. The Edgcumbes – politicians and landowners – lived in some splendour here until the Second World War, when the house was ravaged by German bombs. Much changed after Georgian additions and that wartime damage. The house stands at the head of a gentle incline overlooking Plymouth Sound, and displays treasures collected on grand tours, alongside tapestries and family portraits including one by Joshua Reynolds. But it is the wider estate – the gardens, the coastline, the views – that make a day here so special.

Sprawling across the eastern expanses of the Rame Peninsula, Mount Edgcumbe gazes south towards the Atlantic, and east across Plymouth Sound to the crags of Dartmoor

beyond. Naval history spreads out before you: Drake's Island, the Hoe, the Devonport dockyards and the forts built to forestall Napoleon – right down to the massive bolts and chains drilled to enable ships to moor to beachside boulders, which have been left there to fascinate children and accumulate rust.

Guns and roses

Unsurprisingly, given its strategic position guarding this important naval harbour, the Mount Edgcumbe estate grew to encompass both a grand family home and an artillery zone. Fronting the Tudor blockhouse, dating to the 1540s, stands the Earls Battery, comprising three massive cannon (the last of what was originally 21 guns) aiming across the Sound. The guns are Napoleonic, said to have been taken from captured French frigates after the revolution. They were bought by the Edgcumbes and pointed toward France in an unmistakable gesture of defiance.

In the event, they were used mainly to salute visitors: 42 guns for a monarch, 21 for a prince, 19 for a duke, 15 for an earl. During the Second World War, most of the cannon were replaced by modern guns to protect the submarine net around the dockyard; missing cannon may have been melted down to bolster the war effort. It was also during that war that the last direct heir to the Edgcumbe estate (now managed by Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council) was killed, at Dunkirk; his body was identified only in 2021.

War at sea also shaped the gardens. In 1779, with a Franco-Spanish invasion fleet lying offshore, the family was ordered to clear the coastline of trees. From that devastation emerged the romantic English, French and Italian gardens that flourish today, complete with a belvedere, a 'ruined tower' folly, a mermaid fountain and statues of Roman gods now watching over family picnics. **E**

// It was also during that war that the last direct heir to the Edgcumbe estate was killed, at Dunkirk //

Siân Rees is a historian and author. Her books include *Moll: The Life and Times of Moll Flanders* (Chatto & Windus, 2011)



For more information on Mount Edgcumbe, visit mountedgcumbe.gov.uk



Napoleonic 18-pounder guns reputedly taken from captured French frigates were used to salute important visitors to the Mount Edgcumbe estate



The stately home built by Sir Richard Edgcumbe in the mid-16th century has been adapted, expanded and restored to become the centrepiece of the estate



The 'ruined tower' folly overlooking Drake's Island was built in 1747 using stone from nearby churches



The romantic Italian Garden, featuring an attractive orangery, is a highlight for visitors to Mount Edgcumbe today

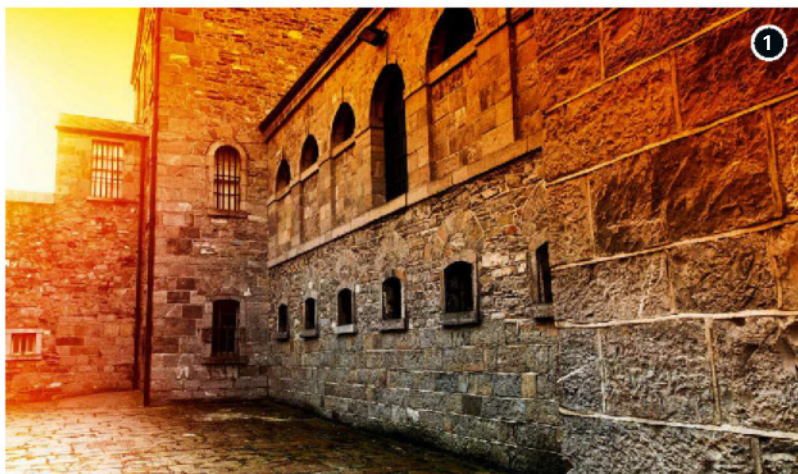
Dublin in five places

From its origins as a Viking settlement, Dublin's history has been rich and turbulent. **GILLIAN O'BRIEN** highlights five spots to explore in the Irish capital

1 Kilmainham Gaol Prominent penitentiary

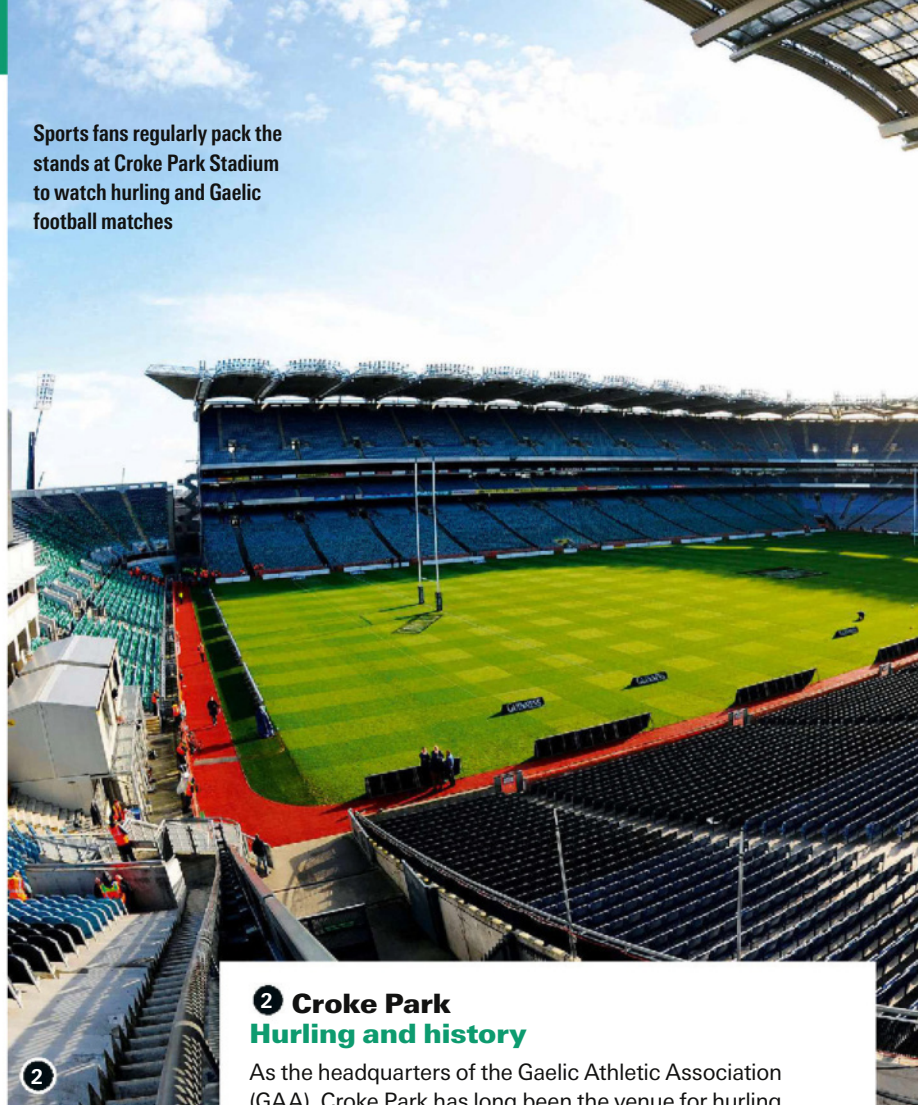
A virtual who's who of famous names were incarcerated at this prison, which opened in 1796 and closed in 1924. Almost all political prisoners were held here, from those involved in the 1798 rebellion – when the United Irishmen rose up against British rule – right up to men captured during the Irish Civil War (1922–23). For example, future president Éamon de Valera was held here after the 1916 Easter Rising (an armed insurrection against the British) and at the end of the Civil War.

But a visit to what's now a fascinating museum also provides insights into the history of the area's poor people, about whose lives there's little recorded evidence – except when they fell foul of the law. The prison's population swelled in the 1840s, during the Great Famine, because many people were jailed for vagrancy and other minor crimes. In the records you'll see a 10-year-old sentenced to 40 days' hard labour for stealing a parsnip, while a nine-year-old girl did a week's hard labour for begging. This is also the site of the executions of 14 men involved in the 1916 Easter Rising. It's an architecturally striking, and moving, place to visit.



A view of Kilmainham Gaol, where scores of famous political prisoners were held

Sports fans regularly pack the stands at Croke Park Stadium to watch hurling and Gaelic football matches



2 Croke Park Hurling and history

As the headquarters of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), Croke Park has long been the venue for hurling and Gaelic football matches, notably the finals. But it also played a significant role in Ireland's political heritage. Many of those who joined the GAA in the years after it was founded in 1884 ultimately became active in the Irish nationalist republican movement. And on 21 November 1920 – known as Bloody Sunday – following assassinations of British intelligence officers by IRA operatives, British troops opened fire at a game, killing 13 spectators and one player. There's now a fascinating museum at Croke Park – but for a real Ireland experience, visit on the day of a hurling match.

3 14 Henrietta Street From prosperity to penury

During the 18th century, Dublin became essentially the second city of the British empire, attracting large numbers of wealthy people who built suitably grand homes. The kind of Georgian architecture that graces important cities in Britain sprang up in Dublin, around such hotspots as Mountjoy Square, Merrion Square and St Stephen's Green. But after the 1800 Act of Union moved direct rule of Ireland back to London, many of the city's wealthier citizens moved away.

Over the 19th century, many of these large houses, abandoned by those rich owners, were divided and subdivided into cramped, unhygienic tenements. Today you can experience such a building at 14 Henrietta Street: it was built in the late 1740s for a single family, but by 1911 more than 100 people were crammed into this one house, living in squalid conditions. It's now an excellent museum.





ALAMY/DREAMSTIME

4 Any Victorian pub Pints and poetry

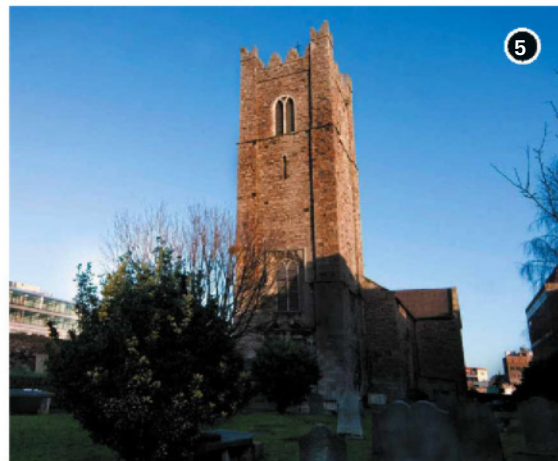
Every visitor to Dublin should sup a pint of the 'black stuff' – Guinness – in one of the many wonderful and historic Victorian pubs. You might wish to visit The Long Hall, dating from the 1860s, or The Stag's Head, or Neary's, or the even older Oval Bar, which opened circa 1822. Take a book by one of the great Dublin authors: James Joyce, Jonathan Swift, perhaps Maeve Binchy, Sally Rooney or Anne Enright, or even an early Sean O'Casey play. Open on the first page, sip your drink, and ponder the many people who've preceded you – writers, revolutionaries and thousands of ordinary thirsty Dubliners.



A pint sits on the bar at The Long Hall, one of Dublin's numerous Victorian pubs



In the 19th century many of Dublin's grand Georgian homes were converted into squalid tenements



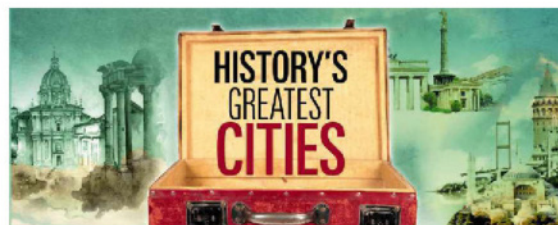
The exterior of St Michan's Church. However, it is the burial vaults below that are of particular historical interest

5 St Michan's Church Tombs that tell tales

Built on the site of a Hiberno-Norse chapel founded in 1095, this church is quite central – just behind the Four Courts, north of the river Liffey – yet it's rather off the beaten tourist trail. Reputedly, Handel practised on the organ here before the premiere of his *Messiah* in 1742, and there are some amazing stained-glass windows.

But the big draw are the burial vaults beneath, containing the remains of many Dublin luminaries. Many have been effectively mummified by the dry air within the limestone walls, while some skeletons are visible, along with amazing velvet-covered coffins. Key figures include John and Harry Sheares, brothers executed outside nearby Newgate Prison following the 1798 rebellion. There's also the death mask of Theobald Wolfe Tone, the most famous United Irishman leader of that same uprising, who died in the Provost's Prison before he could be executed. **H**

Gillian O'Brien is reader in modern Irish history at Liverpool John Moores University and author of *The Darkness Echoing* (Transworld, 2020). She was talking to **Paul Bloomfield**, a travel journalist and the host of *HistoryExtra's* new podcast series, *History's Greatest Cities*



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PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

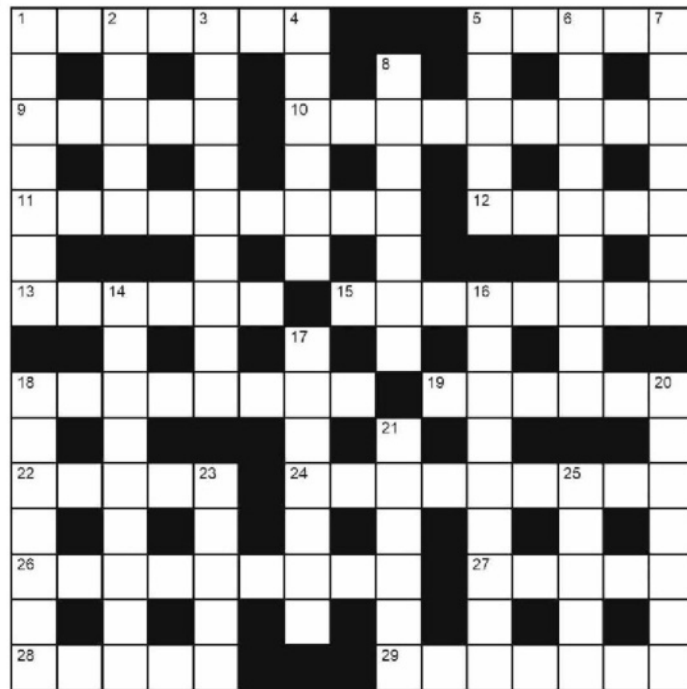
- 1 This Cuban dictator's rule ended in 1959 after Fidel Castro's revolution (7)
 5 Castle in Kent where Anne Boleyn lived as a child (5)
 9 John Dudley, Viscount _____, Duke of Northumberland, virtual leader of England during Edward VI's minority (5)
 10 Mountain of central Greece, in mythology the home of the Muses (9)
 11 Country that was the political centre of the United Provinces of Central America, formed in 1823 (9)
 12 Celebrated privateer who became mayor of Plymouth in 1581 (5)
 13 Herbert, who produced the _____ Seven, the first British car for the popular market (6)
 15 Name applied to many cemeteries of the American West, most famously at Dodge City (4,4)
 18 _____ I, whose accession as Russian emperor in 1825 was opposed by the unsuccessful Decembrist uprising (8)
 19 Monetary units first issued as sovereigns during the reign of Henry VII in 1489 (6)
 22 Symbols of the houses of Lancaster and York (5)
 24 Body armour worn especially by medieval knights (5,4)
 26 _____ Woodville, whom Edward IV married (secretly and against advice and expectation) in 1464 (9)
 27 Queen Boudicca led this East Anglian tribe against the occupying Romans (5)
 28 _____ Besant, feminist and political activist who became the first female president of the Indian National Congress in 1917 (5)
 29 Alfred Russel _____, naturalist who, independently of his contemporary Charles Darwin, developed a theory of evolution by natural selection (7)

Down

- 1 City known as Felsina when founded by the Etruscans in the sixth century BC (7)
 2 Nikola _____, pioneer of alternating electric current who worked for Edison and, later, Edison's rival, Westinghouse (5)
 3 South African founder of the Black Consciousness Movement, killed while in custody in 1977 (5,4)

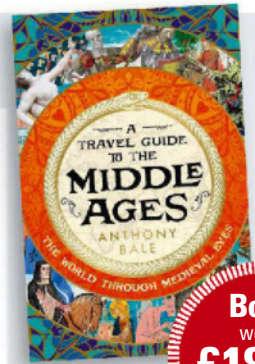


What is the name of the most famous Roman road in Italy? (4 down)



- 4 The _____ Way, first and most celebrated Roman road (6)
 5 The Hoxne _____, a large collection of Roman gold and silver coins discovered in Suffolk in 1992 (5)
 6 Ninth emperor of Rome and founder of the Flavian dynasty (9)
 7 Ken _____, controversial director of *The Devils* (1971), a fictionalised account of 17th-century priest Urbain Grandier (7)
 8 Crime for which Sir Roger Casement was hanged in 1916, having enlisted German support for the Irish cause (7)
 14 The _____ of South Carolina from the US in January 1861 launched a chain of events leading to the American Civil War (9)
 16 Sir James _____, English painter of historical subjects such as the 200 figures in the Painted Hall of the Old Royal Naval College (9)
 17 Imprecise term used for the border areas of Wales and England (7)
 18 Central American dictator captured by US forces and transferred to Florida for trial in 1991/92 (7)
 20 Scottish flag, said to be the oldest in Europe (7)
 21 William Joyce, 'Lord _____', Second World War propaganda broadcaster (3-3)
 23 Wooden post to which condemned heretics were tied for punishment or execution (5)
 25 Roman sporting venue area, its name derived from the Latin for the sand that was scattered across it to absorb blood (5)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



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Solution to our December 2023 crossword

Across 1 Hijack 4 Colossus 10 Los Alamos 11 Hanoi 12 Ezekiel
 13 La Motte 14 NAAFI 16 Amritsar 19 Chambers 22 Rayon 23 Poor Law 25 Alamgir 27 Cairn 28 Rationing 29 Stenness 30 Caudle
Down 1 Holbein 2 Jesse 3 Calvinism 5 Ostler 6 Ogham
 7 Sanctuary 8 St Ives 9/20 Amelia Edwards 15 Aphrodite
 17 Terra Nova 18 Intrigue 21 Sparta 23 Picts 24 Lenin 26 Guild

Four winners of *The Worlds of Sherlock Holmes*:

T Thomas, South Yorkshire; T Gibbons, Newcastle upon Tyne;
 R Snelling, Devon; G Conner, County Down

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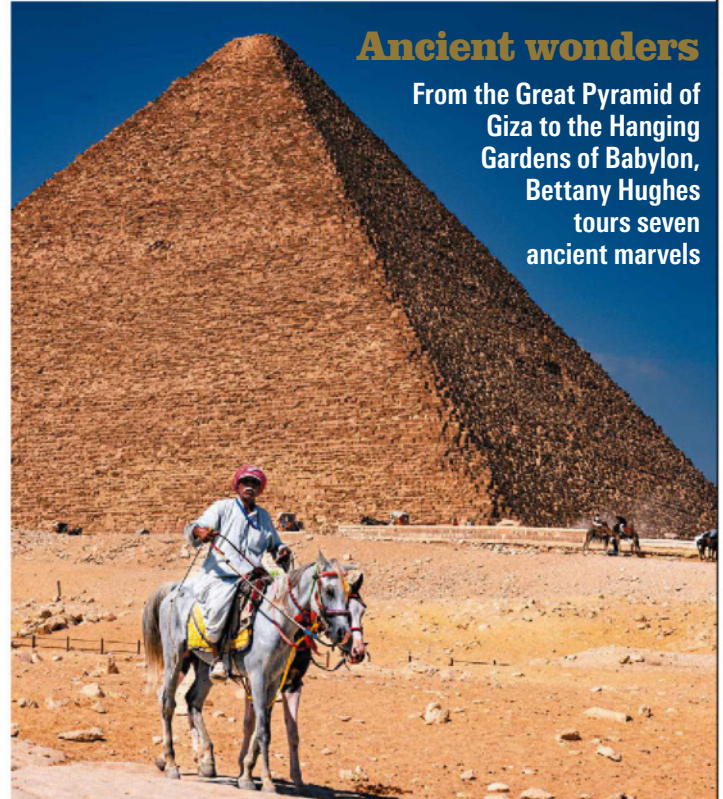
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MY HISTORY HERO

Liberal Democrats leader Ed Davey chooses

Æthelstan

c894–939



Ed Davey has been the leader of the Liberal Democrats since 2020. He is the MP for Kingston and Surbiton



IN PROFILE

Æthelstan was king of the Anglo-Saxons from 924–27 and king of the English from 927–39. The son of Edward the Elder and the grandson of Alfred the Great, his coronation took place in Kingston upon Thames in 925. He is renowned for being the first king of all England, and for his victory at the 937 battle of Brunanburh.

King Æthelstan was “a man of culture, a law-maker and a military leader of some substance”, says Ed Davey

// He should be up there on a list of the greatest kings of England – he arguably did more for his country than Alfred the Great //

When did you first hear about Æthelstan?

When I was studying medieval history for my A-levels. Becoming the MP for Kingston upon Thames a couple of decades later deepened my interest in him because he was one of several Anglo-Saxon kings crowned in my constituency. I’m currently ploughing through a big biography of him – it’s not the lightest of bedtime reading!

What kind of man was he? The historical sources for that period of history are limited, but from what we know he was a strong leader, very pious and well-educated. Having Alfred the Great as a grandfather marked him out as quite a special person, although there was a period before Æthelstan was crowned when it wasn’t clear whether he was going to become king. It appears that he never married or had children – why that was so remains a mystery.

What made him a hero? He was a sophisticated person: a man of culture, a law-maker, a military leader of some substance and the first king to try to impose one coinage for all of England. He was seen as almost the English Charlemagne.

What was Æthelstan’s finest hour? First and foremost, being the first monarch who could really be called the king of the English – Rex Anglorum – something that could not be said of either Alfred the Great or Edward the Elder. Secondly, his victory at the battle of Brunanburh (the exact location of which remains unknown) over a Viking-led coalition. But for that triumph, the English nation might not have survived and would almost certainly not have developed culturally into the country we know today. And thirdly, his importance as both a law-maker and a great benefactor of the church.

Do you think he should be better known? Undoubtedly. He should be up there on a list of the greatest kings of England – he arguably did more for his country economically, culturally and diplomatically than Alfred the Great. Why has he been forgotten? I think in part because he was brought up in what was then the kingdom of Mercia. The Wessex establishment only reluctantly accepted him as king, and some Wessex chroniclers tried to write him out of history.

Would you like to see future monarchs crowned in your constituency? I don’t think that’s very likely! But it would be wonderful if Buckingham Palace would consider a royal visit in 2025 to mark the 1,100th anniversary of Æthelstan’s coronation. Some of the amazing pageantry in Charles’s coronation last year dates back to Æthelstan’s time – and did you know that Æthelstan was the first English king shown wearing a crown? **H**

Ed Davey was talking to York Membery



In Radio 4’s **Great Lives**, guests choose inspirational figures: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxs8



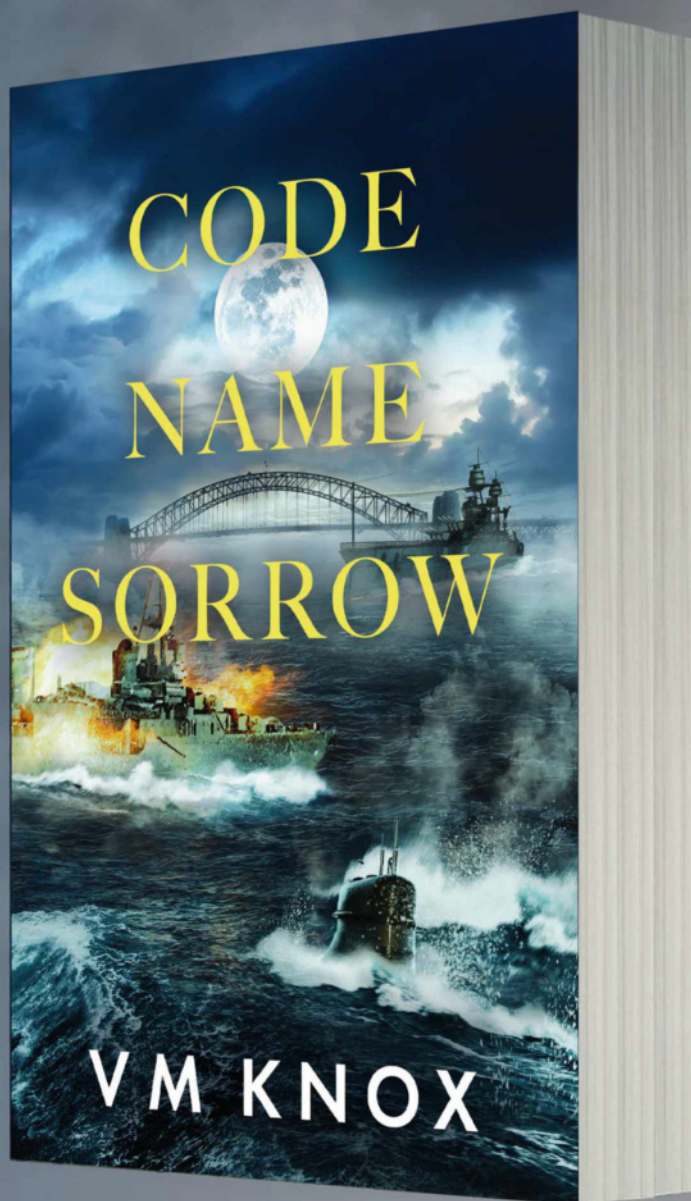
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In May 1942, three Japanese submarines entered Sydney Harbour. Their intention? To destroy the vast array of Allied ships in port. But was there another reason...



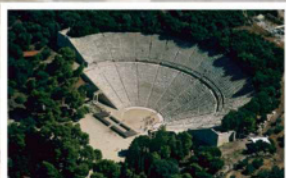
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